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AGNES SOREL,

An Historical Romance.

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"THE FORGERY," "PEQUINILLO," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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AGNES SOREL.

CHAPTER I.

Towns have their varying expressions as well as human faces ; and the aspect of Monterreau on the tenth of September one thousand four hundred and nineteen presented a curious effect ; but one which those who have lived long on the face of this earth must sometimes have seen in moments of great excitement and expectation. The city looked gay ; for it was filled with people ; and the splendour-loving

soldiery in their arms, seen in every direction, gave a brilliancy to the streets which in ordinary times they did not possess. The day was bright and beautiful, too—one of those clear, warm, September days which often succeed a frosty morning; and the trees, which were then mingled with the vineyards on the heights of Surville, caught the rays of the sun upon foliage gently touched with the tints of autumn. The bells of the churches rang out, for it was the Sabbath; and many a fair dame in sparkling attire, and with rosary on wrist, flaunted her Sunday finery along the streets, or might be seen gliding in through the dark portal to join in the service of the day.

Still there was a sort of silent solemnity over the place, and an uneasy calm, if I may use an expression which seems to imply a contradiction: an oppressive expectation. Whenever the bell ceased, no other sound was heard. Men walked in groups, and spoke not; even the women bated their breath, and conversed in lower tones.




Early in the morning, a gay train had passed into the castle, after circling the town till a gate, opening beyond the walls into the fields, had been reached. There were ladies, and waiting-women, and several gentlemen of gallant mien, and a small troop of archers. But the Castle gates swallowed them up, and nothing more was seen of them for several hours. From time to time, two or three horsemen rode out of the town, and sometimes a small party re-entered it. These, however, were the only occurrences which gave any appearance of movement to the scene till after the hour of noon.

About nine o'clock in the morning, indeed, a young man, in the dress of a monk, rode in on a mule, put up his beast at a stable where he was obliged to use the name of the Marquis de Royans to obtain any attention, and then proceeded on foot to a large house situated near the bridge over the Yonne. A number of people were at the door; and he made some in-

quiries, holding a letter in his hand. The answer seemed unsatisfactory ; for he turned away, and walked through the town, inquiring for the Abbey, which lay upon the other side.

There were no signs of approaching the precincts of a Court, as Jean Charost proceeded on the way he had been directed. The two streets through which he passed were nearly deserted ; and, being turned from the sun, looked cool and desolate enough. He began almost to fancy he had made a mistake, when, on the opposite side of a little square, or close, he saw a large and very beautiful building, with a church at one end, and fronted by a row of stone posts. All that was left of it, as far as I remember in one thousand eight hundred and twenty-one, was one beautiful doorway, with a rounded arch overhead, sinking deep with moulding within moulding of many a quaint and curious device, till it made a sort of niche under which the traveller might find shelter from the sun or rain. It was then used as the entrance to a



granary ; but two guards, with halberts on their shoulders, walking slowly up and down, and three or four servants loitering about, or sitting on the steps, showed that it had not been turned to such base uses in the year of our Lord fourteen hundred and nineteen.

Directly towards this door de Brecy took his way, giving a glance round as he passed the corners of the houses opposite, and obtaining a view, down a short street, of the gently flowing Seine, with its ancient bridge, and the walls of the old castle. There seemed to be some curious erections on the bridge, a little pavilion, with a flag fluttering on the top, and several large wooden barricades ; but de Brecy paused not to inquire what they meant ; and, walking straight on to one of the servants, he asked if the Seigneur du Chatel were there, adding that he had been directed thither from his quarters.

This was spoken with a tone of authority, which probably—as well as the glistening of a

military haubergeon above the neck of the monk's frock—procured him a civil answer.

“He is here, sir,” answered the servant; “but is in deep conference with his Highness the Dauphin, and several other lords. He can in no way be interrupted.”

“Give him that letter when he comes from the Council, and fail not,” said Jean Charost. “Moreover, I must beg of you to see immediately the principal officer of his Highness's household, and inform him that the Baron de Brecy, a prisoner of Azincourt, has arrived from England, bearing a letter for the Dauphin from his Highness the Duke of Orleans, and craves leave to lay it at his feet as soon as his convenience serves.”

“I fear, sir, that will not be speedily,” said the servant. “Where may you be found when his Highness has occasion?”

“If Mademoiselle de St. Geran be at the court,” replied Jean Charost, too much discouraged by the impediments he had met with;

to give a direct answer, "I will crave an interview with her. You may tell her," he added, seeing the man take a step back, as if to enter the building, "that Monsieur de Brecy waits—an acquaintance of her childhood, whom he trusts she may remember."

"You had better follow me, sir," said the servant. "She is here, and was alone some half hour ago."

Jean Charost followed the man into the Abbey, one whole wing of which seemed to be appropriated to the Dauphin and his train. No monks were visible; but still the "dim, religious light" of the long passages and arched cloisters, and the quiet courts and galleries, rich in gray stone fretwork, had a solemnity, if not a gloom, which Jean Charost thought must contrast strangely with some of those wild courtly revelries which checkered the fierce strifes and fiery passions of the age.

Passing by a number of small doors leading to the cells along the cloister, where probably the inferior followers of the court were quar-

tered, de Brecy was led to the foot of a flight of highly ornamented stairs, carried boldly up through a wide, lightsome hall, round which it turned, and carved and supported with such skill and delicacy that it seemed actually to hang in air. At the top ran round a gallery, screened by fine tracery of stone-work from the stair-case hall ; and, on the other hand, all round, except where the window was placed to afford light, were doors, and the opening of corridors, over the arch of one of which appeared a mitre, showing that there had formerly been the apartments of the Abbot.

The servant passed on to the next corridor, and then led the visitor along to the very end, where, after knocking at a door, he entered, said a few words, and then opened the door wider for Jean Charost to pass in. The room he entered was small, but richly decorated, having a door apparently leading to another beyond ; and at a table, covered with many-colored silks, which she seemed sorting into their different shades, sat a lady, magnifi-

cently dressed. She raised her eyes, beautiful and full of light, but with no glance of recognition in them ; and, for a moment, de Brecy fancied there must be some mistake. A certain vague, shadowy likeness to the Agnes Sorel he had formerly known, was visible, yet combined with a strange difference. It was the diamond polished, compared with the diamond dull from the mine.

The next instant, however, the likeness suddenly became more strong. Remembrance seemed to flash up in the countenance of the lovely creature before him. She threw down the silk, rose hastily from the table, and exclaimed, with a beaming smile—

“ Ah, Monsieur de Brecy ! He did not give your name rightly.”

She was in the very act of advancing to meet him, but suddenly checked herself, and, from some cause, unexplained, a warm blush rushed over her cheek and forehead, and then the moment after she turned deadly pale.

She recovered herself speedily, welcomed him most kindly, made him sit down by her, and listened to all he had to say. She answered him, too, with every mark of interest; but from time to time she fell into a deep, silent fit of thought, during which her spirit seemed to take wings and fly far away.

“Forgive me, Monsieur de Brecy,” she said, at length, “if I seem sometimes inattentive and absent. Your sudden and unexpected coming carries me back continually to other days, without leaving me any power of resistance—I know not whether to call them happier days, though they were happier in one sense. They were days full of hopes and purposes, alas, not to be accomplished. But we learn hard lessons, Monsieur de Brecy, in this severe school of life. We learn to bear much that we thought we could never bear; and by constantly seeing changes and chances, and all that befalls others, learn to yield ourselves unresistingly to our fate, with the sad philosophy of enjoying the day, from a knowledge

that we have no power over the morrow. Oh, what a lapse of strange things there seems to be since you and I last met! The frightful murder of the poor Duke of Orleans, and your own undeserved sufferings, mark out that distant time, as with a monument. Between that point and this, doubtless, much has occurred to both of us that can never be forgotten. But, God help us! it is well to curb memory with a strong hand, that she run not back to things past; for the course of all mankind is onward. Now let us talk of what can be done for your deliverance. You must, of course, see his Highness the Dauphin before his meeting with the Duke of Burgundy; and I think I can warrant that he will make a strong effort for your deliverance. He is a noble and a generous Prince, and will do much to serve his friends—though Heaven knows he has had discouragement enough to weary the heart, and sink the energies of any one. Nothing but selfishness around him, taking all

the many shapes of that foul, clinging fiend which preys for ever upon human nature, such as ambition, covetousness, petty malice, calumny, sordid envy, ingratitude: wherever he turns, there is one of its hateful Hydra heads gaping wide-mouthed upon him. Yes, you must certainly see him before the meeting; for Heaven knows when there will be another. The meeting! What will be the parting?"

She fell into a fit of thought again, but it lasted not long; and, looking up, she added—

"I know not how it is, Monsieur de Brecey; but a certain sort of dread has come upon me in regard to this meeting, and every one who approaches me seems to feel the same. I cannot help remembering that this man, who comes hither to-day, murdered his own first cousin when pretending the utmost affection for him, and vowing peace and amity at the altar; and I should fear for the Dauphin's safety if I did not know that he has twenty thousand men in this place and neighbourhood, and that every

possible precaution has been taken. What is it, I wonder, makes me feel so sad? Do you think there is any danger?"

"I trust not," replied Jean Charost. "They tell me the two Princes are to meet within barriers, assisted by some of their most experienced councillors, and, though the castle has been given up to the Duke, yet the Dauphin's force is so much superior to any Burgundian body which could be brought up, that it would be madness to attempt any surprise."

"Could he not secretly introduce a large force into the castle" asked Agnes; "and, rushing suddenly upon the bridge, make the Dauphin prisoner?"

"He would be taken in the flank and rear," replied de Brecey; "and speedily punished for his temerity. No, dear lady; as far as I can judge, the interview must be a very safe one. But, if you wish, I will go, and make farther inquiries."

"No, no," returned she. "You must stay here. The Council may break up at any mo-

ment, and I will then introduce you to his Highness—provided they do not sit till after the dinner hour, when it were well for you to go away and return. The Duke, they say, will not be here till two or three o'clock; but he has sent word from Bray that he will assuredly come. Nay, is not Madame de Giac in the Castle? That is a certain sign of his coming. Now let us talk of other things, and turn our eyes once more back to other days. I love a calm, dreamy conference with memory, as one sits over a fire at even-tide, and sees misty pageants of the mind rise up before the half closed eyes, all in a bright soft haze. Do you recollect that boy who played so beautifully upon the violin? He is now the chief musician to her Highness the Dauphiness. Would he were here! He would soon soften down all hard fears and doubts with his sweet music."

Jean Charost took his tone from her; and the conversation proceeded quietly and tranquilly enough for more than an hour, Agnes Sorel

sometimes reverting to her companion's actual situation, but more frequently suffering her thoughts to linger about the past, as those are inclined to do who feel uncertain of the present or the future. Twice she turned the little hour-glass that stood upon the table ; but at length she said—

“ It is in vain to wait longer, Monsieur de Brecy. His Highness's dinner-hour is now fast approaching. Return to me at two o'clock; and in the mean time, if possible, see Tanneguy du Chatel. He may befriend you much ; for he is greatly in the Prince's favor, and, moreover, he is honest and true, though somewhat fierce, and rough of speech, and unforgiving. But he is zealous and faithful for his Prince, and, strange to say, no envier of other men who seem rising into power with less truth and less merit than himself. I will not say farewell ; for we shall meet again shortly. Remember, two o'clock.”

Jean Charost retired at once ; but, as he found his way down the stairs, he heard a door

below thrown suddenly open, and several persons speaking and laughing as they came out. In the hall, at the foot of the stairs, he found about twelve or fifteen individuals slowly moving across, some stopping for a moment to add a word or two to something which had gone before, others hurrying on towards the door by which he had entered the building. Amongst the former, was a tall, powerful man, exceedingly broad in the shoulders, with a long peacock's feather in his cap, who paused for an instant, just at the foot of the stairs, to speak with a thin old man in a black gown.

Jean Charost had just passed them, when he saw the servant with whom he had spoken before, approach the taller man, as if to speak to him; and, before he had taken ten steps more, he heard his name pronounced aloud.

"Monsieur de Brecy—Monsieur de Brecy!" said the voice; and, turning round, he found the personage with the peacock's feather following him. His manner was quick and decided, and not altogether pleasant; yet there

was a frankness about it which one often finds in men of a bold and ready spirit, where there is no great tenderness or delicacy of feeling—stern things and rough, but serviceable and sincere.

“This letter from de Royans,” he said, “comes at a moment of some hurry; but yet your business wants speedy attention. I am the Seigneur du Chatel. Come to my house and dine. We will talk as we eat. We have not time for ceremony.”

As he spoke, he took hold of Jean Charost’s arm, as if he had been an old friend, and drew him on with long strides to the house at which he had called in the morning. As they went, he inquired what he had done in the matter of his ransom; and when he heard that he had seen Mademoiselle de St. Geran, and interested her in his behalf, he exclaimed—

“’Tis the best thing that could be done. I could not serve you as well as she can. Are you an old friend of hers?”

“I knew her when she was a mere girl,” answered Jean Charost.

Du Chatel hardly seemed to hear his answer; for he seemed, like Agnes Sorel, subject to fits of deep thought that day, and he did not wake from the reverie into which he had fallen till they reached the door of his dwelling. Then, as they were mounting the steps, he broke forth again with the words :

“ She can do what she will. Lucky that she always wills well for France.—Let me see—” Then, speaking to a servant, he added: “ Dinner instantly. Tell Marivaulx to have my armour all laid out ready.—Come, de Brecey ; all I can do for you, I will. But that is only to make you known to the Dauphin, and it must be hastily, too. The fair Agnes must plead your cause with him ; though I think it will not need much pleading.”

While he had been speaking, he had advanced into a little room on the left hand side of the entrance, where a small table was laid, as if for the dinner of one person ; and, throwing himself on a stool, he pointed to another, saying :

"If this interview ends well, I think there can be no doubt of your success."

"I trust it will end well," said Jean Charost.
"Is there any reason to think otherwise?"

"Hum!" ejaculated Tanneguy du Chatel.
"That will depend altogether upon the Duke of Burgundy. He is puffed up and insolent, and there be hot spirits about the Dauphin. It were well for him not to use such bold words as he has lately indulged in. We all mean him well and fairly; but, if he ruffles his wings as he has lately done, he may chance to go back with his feathers singed, and then, my good friend, your suit would be of no avail.—Ah! here comes the pottage. Eat, eat; for we must be quick.—It must be a strange thing," he continued, after he had taken his soup; "it must be a strange thing to go about the world with the consciousness that every man in all the land believes one's death would be the salvation of France! I should not like the sensation.—Here, wine! Boy, give me wine.—God send that this all ends well! If the Duke of Bur-

gundy will but be reasonable, sacrifice some small part of his ambition to his country's good, remember that he is a subject and a Frenchman, and fulfil his promises, we may see bright and happy days once more, and drive these islanders from the land. If not, we are all at sea again."

"I trust he will," answered Jean Charost; "yet he is of a stern, unbending spirit, as I have cause to know."

"Ha! Has he been *your* enemy, too?" asked du Chatel.

"Not exactly," answered Jean Charost. "Indeed, long ago, he made me high offers if I would enter his service; but it was an insult, rather than a compliment; for he had just then caused the assassination of the Duke of Orleans, my noble lord."

Du Chatel ground his teeth.

"Ah, the villain!" he exclaimed. "That is a score to be wiped off yet.—But you must have done something to serve him previously. John of Burgundy is not a man to court any

one without some strong motive of self-interest."

"I have often puzzled myself as to what could be his motive," rejoined Jean Charost, with a smile; "but have never been able even to guess at any inducement, unless it were some words of an astrologer at Pithiviers, who told him I should be present at his death, and try to prevent it."

"Heaven send the prophecy may be soon accomplished!" exclaimed Tanneguy du Chatel, with a laugh. "I longed to send my sword through him the other day at Troyes; but I thought it would be hardly courteous in his own house, when we were eating together. But, if I could meet with him, lance to lance in the field, I think one or the other of us would not ride far afterwards."

"Shall I give you more wine, my Lord?" asked a page, advancing with a flagon.

"No," replied his master; "I am hot enough already.—Change that dish. What is there else for dinner?"

A man came in as he spoke, and said, in a low voice :

“ The Duke is on the road, my lord.”

“ Well, let him come,” replied du Chatel.

“ We are ready for him.”

“ Perhaps he may not come on still,” said the man ; “ for Anthony of Thoulangeon and John of Ermay have been examining the barricades upon the bridge, with somewhat dark faces, and have ridden out to meet the Duke, their master.”

“ Then let him stay away,” answered Du Chatel, abruptly. “ We mean him no ill. He has been courted enough. It’s his own conscience makes him afraid to come.—Here is some hare, de Brecey. Take some wine, take some wine—I do not require so full a diet as you do.—Odd’s life ! they let you blood enough at Azincourt to keep you calm and tranquil.”

When the brief, frugal dinner was over, Tanneguy du Chatel started up, saying :

“ I must go get on my harness. You hurry

back to the beautiful lady you wot of, and wait with her till you hear from me, unless the Dauphin comes in, and your business is settled. If not, I will present you to him before the interview, in the good hope that matters will go smoothly, and some fair conditions be settled for the good of France. I know not what is in me to-day. I feel as if quickened by another spirit.—Well, I must get on this armour.”

Thus saying, he left the room, and Jean Charost found his way back to the Abbey, where he was kept for some time before he obtained audience of Agnes Sorel.

When he was, at length, admitted, he found her seated with another lady, somewhat younger than herself, and very beautiful also, with their arms thrown round each other's waists. Neither moved when Jean Charost entered ; but Agnes, bowing her head, said,

“This is Monsieur de Brecy, madam ; of whom I spoke to your Highness. Monsieur de Brecy, I present you to the Dauphiness.”

Jean Charost, it need hardly be said, was greatly surprised, and in some degree embarrassed; for the suspicions of others had created suspicions in himself, which he now mistakenly thought were mistaken. He paid all due reverence to the Dauphiness, however, and remained nearly an hour conversing with her and the beautiful Agnes, who were both waiting anxiously, it seemed, for the appearance of the Dauphin. The part of the house in which they were, was very quiet; but the sounds from the country came more readily to the ear than those proceeding from the town. Some noise, like the hoof-tramp of many horses, was heard; and the Dauphiness looked at Agnes anxiously.

"What is that? Can you see, Monsieur de Brecy?" asked the latter; and Jean Charost sprang to the window.

"A large party of horse," he answered. "I should judge, from four to five hundred men."

“It is the Duke !” exclaimed the Dauphiness.
 “Dearest Agnes, are you sure there is no danger ? Remember the Duke of Orleans.”

“True, madam,” replied Agnes ; “but he was well nigh alone. His Highness has twenty thousand men around him.”

The Dauphiness cast down her eyes in thought ; and, the moment after, one of the officers of the household entered, saying,

“Monsieur de Brecy, the Seigneur du Chatel desires to see you below.”

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Jean Charost reached the bottom of the grand stair-case, he found everything below in a state of great hurry and confusion. A number of persons were passing out; and stately forms, and burnished arms, and waving plumes, were seen flowing along through the corridor like a stream. At the foot of the stairs, stood Tanneguy du Chatel, in complete arms, with his right foot raised upon the first step, his knee supporting the pommel of a small battle-axe, and his hand resting on the blade of the weapon. His beaver was up, and the expression of his countenance was eager and impatient.

“Quick, quick, de Brecy !” he said. “The Prince has gone on. We must catch him before

the interview begins, if you would speed in your suit."

"I am ready," said the young man. And on they hastened, somewhat impeded by the number of attendants and noblemen of the Dauphin's court, who were already following him towards the bridge over the Seine. They issued out of the Abbey, at length, and then made greater progress in the open streets. Nevertheless, they did not overtake the Prince and the group that immediately surrounded him, till he had reached the foot of the high-arched bridge, on which the barriers were erected. In the open space, on either side of the bridge between the houses and the water, were assembled a strong body of horse, and two large companies of archers. A herald and a marshal kept the way clear for the Prince and his train, and no one appeared upon the bridge itself, but two men, stationed at each of the four barriers, to open and close the gates as the several parties passed in. On the op-

posite side of the river was seen the old Castle, with its outworks coming quite down to the bridge ; but nobody appeared there, except a few soldiers on the walls.

“Here is Monsieur de Brecy, Royal sir,” said Tanneguy du Chatel, approaching the Dauphin—a tall and graceful, but slightly-formed, young man—“the gentleman who has been a prisoner since Azincourt, of whom I spoke to your Highness, as did also, I hear, your Royal lady, and Mademoiselle de St. Geran.”

The Dauphin turned partly round, and gave one glance at Jean Charost, saying,

“Bring him in with you, du Chatel. We will speak with him within the barriers ; for, by all I see, my fair cousin of Burgundy intends to keep me waiting.”

Thus saying, the Dauphin passed on with two or three other persons, the barrier being raised to give him admission. The man in charge of the gate seemed to hesitate at the

sight of Jean Charost, in his monk's gown ; but du Chatel exclaimed, sharply,

“ The Baron de Brecey. Let him pass—I am his warrant.”

The second barrier was passed in the same way as the first by the Dauphin and his immediate followers ; but a number of the train remained between the two barricades, according to orders apparently previously given. The keeper of the second barrier made greater difficulty than the other, to let Jean Charost pass, and it was not till the Dauphin himself turned his head, and said, “ Let him enter,” that the rail was raised.

Across the centre of the bridge, a single light rail was drawn, and in the space between that and the second barrier, was placed a little pavilion, decorated with crimson silk, and furnished with a chair for the use of the Prince. He advanced at once towards it, and seated himself ; those who accompanied him, in number about two or three-and-twenty, gathered round, and an eager conversation


seemed to take place amongst them. Tanneguy du Chatel mingled with the rest, approaching close to the side of the Dauphin; but Jean Charost remained on the verge of the group, unnoticed, and apparently forgotten.

A voice was heard to say something regarding the insolence of keeping his Highness waiting; and then du Chatel answered, in a frank tone,

“Not insolence, perhaps—suspicion, and fear, very likely.”

“We wish him no ill,” said the Dauphin. “Let him keep his promises, and we will embrace him with all friendship. Perhaps he does not know that we are here. Go and summon him, du Chatel.”

Without reply, Tanneguy hastened away, vaulted, armed as he was, over the rail which crossed the bridge at the centre, and passed through the two other barriers on the side of the castle, disappearing under the arch-way of the gate.



The eyes of most persons present were turned in that direction; but the Dauphin looked round, with a listless air, as if for some object with which to fill up the time; and, seeing Jean Charost, he beckoned him.

“I am glad to see you, Monsieur de Brecey,” he said. “They tell me you have a letter for me from my cousin of Orleans. Were you not, if I remember rightly, the secretary of his father, my uncle, who was so basely murdered?”

“I was, your Highness,” replied Jean Charost. “Permit me to present you the young Duke’s letter.”

The Dauphin took it, but did not break the seal; and said:

“I grieve deeply for my good cousin’s long imprisonment; and, if we can bring this stout-hearted Duke of Burgundy to anything like reasonable terms of accommodation, I doubt not that we should be able to conclude an honourable peace with England, in which case his liberation shall be stipulated, and yours, too,

Monsieur de Brecy ; for I am told you not only served well, and suffered much, at Azincourt, but that your noble devotion to my murdered uncle had well nigh cost your own life. Rest assured you shall be remembered."

Jean Charost judged rightly whence the Prince's information came ; and he was expressing his thanks, when some of those who were standing round, exclaimed :

" The Duke is coming, your Highness."

" Somewhat late," said the young Prince, with a frown ; " but better that than not come at all.—Well, go some of you, and do him honour."

Thus saying, he rose, and advanced slowly towards the rail across the bridge, on which he leaned, crossing his arms upon his chest.

In the meanwhile, a small party, consisting of ten or twelve people, were seen approaching from the gate of the Castle. At the first barrier they halted, and a short consultation seemed to take place, in the course of which they were joined by six or seven noblemen,

who had left the group about the Dauphin by his command. They then moved forward again; but, a little way in advance of them, came Tanneguy du Chatel with a quick step and a flushed countenance.

"This man is very bold, my Prince," he said, in a low tone. "God send his looks and words may be more humble here; for I know not how any of us will bear it."

"Go back—go back, and bring him on," said the Dauphin. "He shall hear some truths he may not lately have heard. Be you calm, du Chatel, and leave me to deal with him. I will not spare."

Eagerness to see all the strange scene that was passing, had led Jean Charost almost close to the rail by the time that Tanneguy du Chatel advanced once more to meet the Duke of Burgundy. That Prince was now easily to be distinguished a little in advance of his company; and Jean Charost remarked that he had greatly changed since he last saw him. Though still a strong and active man, he looked

much older; and deep lines of anxious thought were traced upon his cheek and brow. At first, his eyes were fixed upon the Dauphin, who continued to lean against the rail without the slightest movement; but, as he came on, the Duke looked to the right and left, running his eyes over the Prince's attendants, and, when about ten steps from the rail, they rested firmly and inquiringly on the face of Jean Charost. For a moment, the sight seemed to puzzle him; but then a look of recognition came over his countenance, and the next instant he turned deadly pale.

A sort of hesitation was seen in his step and air; but he recovered himself at once, advanced straight to the Dauphin, and bent one knee to the ground before him, throwing his heavy sword behind with his left hand.

The Dauphin moved not, spoke not, for a moment; but gazed upon the Duke with a heavy and frowning brow.

"Well, cousin of Burgundy," he said, at length, without asking him to rise, "you have

come at last. I thought you were going to violate your promise now, as in other cases."

"I have violated no promises, Charles of France," replied the Duke, in a tone equally sharp.

"Heaven is witness that you have," answered the Dauphin. "Did you not promise to cease from war? Did you not promise to withdraw your garrisons from five cities where they still are?"

The Duke's face flushed, his eyes sparkled, and his brow contracted. What he replied, Jean Charost did not hear; but, seeing a gentleman close to the Dauphin lay his hand upon his dagger, he caught him by the arm, whispering:

"Forbear! Forbear!"

At the same moment, one of the Dauphin's officers, who had gone to meet the Duke, took that Prince by the arm, saying:

"Rise, sir! Rise! You are too honourable to remain kneeling."

Whether the Duke heard or mistook him,

I know not ; but he turned sharply towards him with a fierce look ; and, either moved by his haughty spirit, or in order to rise more easily, he put his right hand on the hilt of his sword ; and Robert de Loire exclaimed, in a voice of thunder :

“ Dare you put your hand on your sword in the presence of our Lord, the Dauphin ? ”

“ It is time that this should cease,” cried Tanneguy du Chatel, his whole countenance inflamed, and his eyes flashing fire ; and at the same moment he struck the Duke a blow with the axe he carried in his hand.

Burgundy started up, and partly drew his sword ; but another blow beat him on his knee again, and another cast him headlong to the ground. A strong man, named Oliver de Layet, and another, sprang upon him and thrust a sword into his body. At the same moment, a scuffle occurred at a little distance between one of the followers of the Duke, and some of the Dauphin’s party, and Jean Charost saw a man fall ; but all was confused and indistinct.

Horror, surprise, and a wild grasping effort of the mind to seize all the consequences to France, to England, to himself which might follow that dreadful act, stupified and confounded him. Everything passed, as in a dream, with rapid indistinctness, to be brought out vivid and strong by an effort of memory. That the Duke of Burgundy was killed at the very feet of the Dauphin, was all that his mind had room for at the moment.

The next instant, a voice exclaimed—"Look to the Dauphin ! Look to the Dauphin !" and Jean Charost saw him staggering back from the rail as pale as death, and with his eyes half closed.

It is not unlikely that many there present had contemplated as possible some such event as that which had taken place, without any definite purpose of effecting it, or taking any part therein. Popular expectation has often something prophetic in it; and the warning voice which had rendered so many grave and thoughtful, during the whole course of that

morning, must have been heard also by the actors of the scene which had just passed. But one thing is certain, for the whole history of the time leaves no doubt of the fact, that the Dauphin himself had neither any active share in his cousin's death, nor any participation in a conspiracy to effect it. They bore him back fainting to the little pavilion which had been raised for his accommodation, and thence led him, in profound silence, to the Abbey, while his followers secured a number of the Duke of Burgundy's immediate attendants, and the soldiery, crowding upon the bridge, threatened the Castle itself with assault.

Jean Charost retired from the scene with a sad heart. His hopes were disappointed : his fate seemed sealed ; but, though he felt all this bitterly, yet he felt still more despondency at the thought of his unhappy country's fate. Personal rivalry, selfish ambition, greed of power and of wealth, undisciplined valor, insubordinate obstinacy, were all urging her on to the verge of a preci-

pice from which a miracle seemed necessary to save her. The feelings which filled his breast at that moment were very like those expressed by the contemporary historian when he wrote—

“Only to hear recounted, this affair is so pitiful and lamentable that greater there cannot be ; and especially the hearts of all noble men, and other true men, natives of the kingdom of France, must be of great sadness and shame in beholding those of such noble blood as of the *fleur de lis*, so near of kindred, themselves destroy one another, and the same kingdom placed, in consequence of the facts above mentioned, and others past and done before, in the way and the danger of falling under a new lord, and altogether going to perdition.”

CHAPTER III.

To dwell minutely upon a period unfilled by action and merely marked by the revolution of day and night, even in the life of a person in whom we have some interest, would be almost as dull as to describe in detail the turning of a grindstone. It is not with the eventless events of a history that we have to do—not with the flat spaces on the road of life. We sit not down to describe a sleep, or to paint a fish pond.

Little occurred to Jean Charost, during the rest of his stay in France, that is worth the telling, which will not be referred to hereafter. Let us change the scene then, and, spreading the wing of fancy, fly on through the air of time about three years in advance, to a spot in another kingdom.


An old house, or rather palace, and well it deserved the name, was situated near the great

city of London, close upon the banks of the river Thames. Men, now living, can remember parts of it still standing, choked up with houses like some great shell of the green deep, encrusted with limpets and other tiny habitations of the vermin of the sea. At the time of this history it had gardens running all around it, extending widely and pleasantly on the water-side, though but narrow between the palace itself, and the stone battlement-wall which separated them from the great Strand road, leading from the Temple gate of the city to the village of Charing.

Fretted and richly carved in some parts, plain and stern in others, the old palace of the Savoy combined in itself the architecture of several ages. Many, too, were the purposes it had served : sometimes the place of revelry and mirth : sometimes the witness of the prisoner's tears. It had been the residence of John, King of France, during his captivity in England, some half century before ; and since that time it had principally served—grown almost by

prescription to be so used—as an honorable prison for foreign enemies when the chances of war brought them in bonds to England.

In the midst of the embattled wall that I have mentioned, and projecting a little beyond its line, stood a great gate-house, which has long since been pulled down, or has fallen perhaps, without the aid of man; and that gate-house had two large towers of three stories each, affording very comfortable apartments, as that day went, to their occasional tenants. They were roomy, and pleasant of aspect enough. One of these towers was appropriated to the warders of the Savoy and their families, while the other received, at various times, a great number of different denizens, sometimes Princes sometimes prisoners, sometimes refugees; people who remained but a few days, people who passed there half a life-time. The stone walls within were thickly traced with names, some scrawled with chalk, or written in ink; and, amongst these, the most conspicuous were records of the existence there for several years



of persons attached to the unfortunate King John.

It was a cheerful building in those days. Nothing obscured the view, or hid the sunshine; and the smiling gardens, the glittering river, or the busy high-road, could be seen from most of the windows of the palace.

In a room on the first floor of the eastern tower of the gate-house, Jean Charost is once more before us. Monterreau's blood-stained bridge, the Dauphin, and the murderers, and the dying Duke of Burgundy, have passed away, and there are but two women with him—yes, I may call them women, both, though their ages are very far apart. One is in the silver-haired decline of life, the other is just blossoming: they are the withered flower and the bud.

They were seated round a little table, and had evidently been talking earnestly. Madame de Brecy's eyes had traces of tears on them; and those of the young girl, turned up to

Jean Charost's face, were full of eagerness and entreaty.

“ In vain, dear mother, in vain !” said Jean Charost. “ My resolution is as firm as ever. Jacques Cœur is generous ; but I cannot lay myself under such an obligation, and, even at the most moderate rate, to raise such a sum in the present state of France, would deprive you of two-thirds of our whole income. This captivity is weary to me—to remain here year after year, while France has been dismembered, her crown bought and sold, her fair fields ravaged, her cities become slaughter-houses, has been terrible—has doubled the load of time, has depressed my light spirits, and almost worn out hope and expectation. Yet I will not trust the fate of two so dear as you two to the power of circumstances. You say, apply to Lord Willoughby. I have applied. But it is in vain. He gives me, as you know, all possible liberty : no act of kindness or courtesy is wanting. But on one point he is inflexible, and

we all feel and know that he is ruled by a power which he must obey. It is the same with others who have prisoners of some consideration. They cannot place them at reasonable ransom, though the rules of chivalry and courtesy require it."

"Lord Willoughby seems a kind man, Jean," said the young girl, still looking in his face. "He spoke gently and good-humouredly to me."

"Ay, but gentleness and good humour, my sweet Agnes," returned Jean Charost, "will not make a man disobey the commands of his monarch. Another month, and I shall have lain a prisoner seven long years. Why, Agnes, my hair is growing grey, while yours is getting darker every hour. I can recollect your locks like sunshine on a hill, and now a raven's wing is hardly blacker."

"Ah, I saw a grey hair the other day in that curl upon your temple," said the girl, with a laugh. "You will soon be a white-headed old man, Jean, if you obstinately remain here, when our dear mother would

willingly sell everything to free you—though I think, after all, you are getting a little younger since we came. We have now been a year with you in this horrible country, and I think you look a year younger.”

Jean Charost smiled, saying,

“Certainly I do, Sunshine, else do you shine in vain.”

“Well, I am going out to seek more sunshine,” said the girl. “I will wander away up the bank of the river, and say an Ave at the Blackfriars Church. And then, perhaps, I may go into the church of the Templars, and look at the tombs of the old knights, with their feet crossed, and their swords half drawn; and then I shall come back again, for it will be dinner-time. Good-bye till then.”

She tripped away with a light step down the stair-case, and out upon the road; but when Jean Charost looked after her out of the window, he saw her going slowly and thoughtfully along.

Agnes, however, did not continue that pace for any great distance. As soon as she was out of

sight of the gate-tower of the Savoy, she hurried on with great rapidity, turned up a narrow lane between two fields on the north of the road, and, passing the house of the Bishop of Lincoln, without even stopping to scent her favourite briar-rose, which was thick upon the hedges, paused at a modern brick house—modern in those days—with towers and turrets in plenty, and the arms of the house of Willoughby hung out from a spear above the gate.

An old, white-headed man sat upon the great stone bench beneath the arch-way, and a soldier moved backwards and forwards upon a projecting gallery in front of the building. A page, playing with a cat, was seen farther in under the arch in the blue shade; and one or two loiterers were visible in the court beyond, on the side where the summer sun could not visit them.

Agnes stopped by the porter's side, and asked if she could see the Lord Willoughby.

"Doubtless, doubtless," said the man, "if

he be not taking his forenoon sleep ; and that can hardly be, for old Thomas of Erpingham has been with him, and the right worshipful deaf knight's sweet voice would well nigh rouse the dead—especially when he talks of Azincourt. Go, boy, to our lord, and tell him a young maiden wants to see him. Ah ! I can recollect the time when that news would have got a speedy answer ; but alack, fair lady, we grow slow as we get old. Sit you down by me, now, till the page returns, and then the saucy fellows in the court dare not gibe.”

Agnes seated herself as he invited her ; but she had not waited long ere the boy returned, and ushered her through one long passage to a room on the ground-floor, where she found the old lord writing a letter—with some difficulty it must be confessed, for he was no great scribe—but very diligently. He hardly looked round, but continued his occupation, saying,

“ What is it, child ? The boy tells me you would speak with me.”

“ When you have leisure, my good Lord,”

replied Agnes, standing a little behind him. But the old man started at her voice, and turned round to gaze at her.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, “my little French lady, is that you? It is very strange; but your face always puts me in mind of some one else, and your tongue does so too. However, there is no time in life to think of such things. Sit you down—sit you down a moment. I shall soon have finished this epistle. Would it were in the fire!—I have but a line to add.”

He was nearly a quarter of an hour, however, in writing that line; and Agnes sat mute and thoughtful, gazing at his face, and, as we are wont to do, when we have important interests depending on another person, drawing auguries from every line about it. It was an honest, old English face, with an expression of frank good-nature, a little testiness, and much courtesy; and the young girl drew favorable inferences before she ended her reverie.

At length, the letter was finished, folded,

sealed, and despatched ; and then, turning to Agnes, the old soldier took her hands in his, saying—


“I am glad to see you, my dear. What is it you want ? Our friend at the Savoy—your father—brother—husband—I know not what—is not ill, I hope ?”

“Very ill,” replied Agnes, in a quiet, gentle tone.

“Ha !” cried the old Lord. “How so ? what is the matter ?”

“He is ill at ease, my lord—sick at heart—is in a fever to return to his own land.”

“You little deceiver !” cried Lord Willoughby, laughing ; “you made me anxious about the good young Baron, and now it is but the old story after all. But why should he pine so to get back to France ? This is a fine country ; this a fine city ; and God is my witness I do all I can to make him happy. He is little more than a prisoner in name.”



“But still a prisoner, my lord,” replied Agnes, with touching earnestness. “The very name is the chain. Think you not that, to a gentleman, a man of a free spirit, the very feeling of being a prisoner, is heavier than fetters of iron to a serf? You may cage a singing bird, my lord: but an eagle beats itself to death against the bars. Would *you* be content to rest a captive in France, however well treated you might be? Would you be content to know that you could not revisit your own dear land, see the scenes where your youth had passed, embrace your friends and relations, breathe your own native air? Would you be content to sit down at night in a lonely room, not in your own castle; and, looking at your wrists, though you saw not the fetters there, say to yourself—‘I am a captive, nevertheless—a captive to my fellow man: I cannot go where I would, or do what I would: I am bound down to times and places—a prisoner—a prisoner still, though I may carry my prison

about with me'? Would any man be content with this? And if so, how much less can a knight and a gentleman sit down in peace and quiet, content to be a prisoner in a foreign land, when his country needs his services, when every gentleman of France is wanted for the aid of France, when his King is to be served, his country's battles to be fought, even against you, my lord, and his own honor and renown to be maintained!"

"Ay, you touch me there—you touch me there, young lady," said the old nobleman. "On my life, for my part, I would never keep a brave enemy in prison; but have him pay only what he could for ransom, and then let him go to fight me again another day."

"Monsieur de Brecy's father," continued Agnes, simply, "died in a lost field against the English. The son is here in an English prison. Think you not he envies his father?"

"Perhaps he does, perhaps he does," cried



Lord Willoughby, starting up, and walking backwards and forwards in the room. "But what can I do?" he continued, stopping before Agnes, and gazing at her with a look of sincere distress. "The king made me promise that I would not liberate any of my prisoners, so long as he and I both lived, without his special consent, except at the heavy ransoms he himself had fixed. My dear child, you talk like a woman, and yet you touch me like a child. But you can, I am sure, understand that it is not in my power; or, upon my faith and chivalry, I would grant what you desire."

The tears rose in the beautiful eyes of Agnes.

"I knew you would be kind," she said. "But his mother insisted upon selling all they have to pay his ransom. He would not have it so, for it would reduce her to poverty; and I came away to see if I could not move you."

"On my life," cried Lord Willoughby, "I have a mind to send you to the King."

"Where is he?" asked Agnes. "I am ready to go to him at once."

The old lord shook his head.

"He is in France," he said; and was going on to add something additional, when a tall servant suddenly opened the door, and began some announcement by saying—

"My lord, here is—"

But he was not suffered to finish the sentence; for a powerful, middle-aged man, unarmed, but booted and spurred, pushed past him into the room; and Lord Willoughby exclaimed—

"Ha! Dorset! what brings you from France? Has aught gone amiss?"

The latter question was not without cause; for there was more than haste in the expression of the Earl of Dorset's countenance: grief was there, and anxiety.

With a hasty step, he advanced to Lord Willoughby, laid his hand upon his arm, and said something in a low voice, which Agnes did not



hear. The old lord started back with a look of sorrow and consternation.

“Dead!” he exclaimed—“dead!—So young, so full of life, so needful to his people! Dorset, Dorset! in God’s name, say that my ears have deceived me! Killed in battle, ha? Some random bolt from that petty town of Cone, whither he was marching when last I heard. It must be so. He, like the great Richard, was doomed to find such a fate—to fall before an insignificant hamlet by a peasant’s hand. He exposed himself too much, Dorset—he exposed himself too much.”

Dorset shook his head.

“No,” he replied. “He died of sickness in his bed, but like a soldier and a hero still; calmly, courageously, without a faltering thought or sickly fear. Heaven rest his soul! we shall never have a greater or a better King. But harkee, Willoughby! I must go on at once and summon the Council. Come you up with all speed; for there will be much matter for

anxious deliberation, and need of wise heads and great experience."

"I will, I will," returned Lord Willoughby. "Ho, boy, without there! Get my horses ready with all speed. Farewell, Dorset; I will join you in half-an-hour. Now—Odd's life, my sweet young lady, I had forgot your presence. What was it we were saying? Oh, I remember now. The course of earthly events is very strange. That which brings tears to some eyes, wipes them away from others. Come hither. I will write a note to your young guardian, and none but yourself shall be its bearer. My duty to my King is done, and I am free to act as I will. Stay for it: it shall be very short."

He then drew a scrap of paper towards him, and wrote slowly upon it—

"The ransom of the Baron de Brecey is diminished one half.

"In witness whereof I have set my hand,

"WILLOUGHBY."



“There, take it, dear child,” he said, “and let him thank God, and thank you.” And, drawing her towards him, he imprinted a kind and fatherly kiss upon her forehead, and then led her courteously to the door.

CHAPTER IV.

SOMETIMES very small and insignificant occurrences, even when anticipated and prepared for, produce mighty and unforeseen consequences ; sometimes great and startling events, the least expected, and the least provided against, pass away quietly without producing any immediate result.

Henry the Fifth of England had returned to France in high health, had triumphed over all enemies, and had used the very storms and tempests of passion and faction as instruments of his will. All yielded before him : victory seemed his right, health and long life his privilege, and success the obedient servant of his will. No one contemplated a change : no one even dreamed of a reverse : defeat was never thought of : death was never mentioned.

There was no expectation, no preparation. But, in the midst of triumph, and activity, and energetic power, he was touched by the transforming wand of sickness. Few hours were allowed him to set his house in order; and, in the prime of life, and the midst of glory, the successful general, the gallant knight, the wise statesman, the ambitious king, closed his eyes upon the world, and nothing but a mighty name remained.

What changes might have been expected to follow an event so little contemplated! Yet very few, if any, occurred. His last hours, while writhing on a bed of pain, sufficed to regulate all the affairs of two great kingdoms; and his wisdom and foresight, as well as his energy and resolution, were never more strongly displayed than on the bed of death. All remained quiet: the sceptre of England passed from the hand of the hero to the hand of the child; and, in France, no popular movement of any importance showed that the people were awakened to the value of the chances before them. All re-

mained quiescent : the vigorous and unsparring hand of Bedford seemed no less strong than had been that of his departed brother ; and, reduced to a few remote provinces, the party of the Dauphin seemed powerless and inert.

It was while this state continued that three persons entered the old hall of the Chateau of Brecy, just as the sun was going down. An elderly lady leaned with a feeble and fatigued air upon the arm of Jean Charost : Agnes had both her hands clasped upon his other arm ; and all three paused at the door, and looked round with an expression, if not sad, yet somewhat anxious. All were very glad to be there again : all were very glad to be even in France once more. But three years make a great difference in men, in countries, and in places ; and when we return to an ancient dwelling-place, we are more conscious, perhaps, of the workings of time, than at any other period. We feel within ourselves that we are changed, and we expect to find a change in external objects also : we look to see a stone fallen from the walls, the

moss or mildew upon the panelling, the monitory dust resting on the floor, the symptoms of alteration and decay apparent in the place of cherished memories.

Nothing of the kind, however, was to be seen in the old hall of the Chateau of Brecy. The evening rays of sunshine, gliding through the windows, shone cheerfully against the wall. The room was swept and garnished. All was neat and in good array; and it seemed as if, from that little circumstance alone, Hope relighted her lamp for the somewhat despondent hearts of the newly-arrived family.

"Bright days may be before us yet, my son," said Madame de Brecy, in a calm, grave tone.

"Oh, yes! there will be bright days," said Agnes, warmly and enthusiastically. "We are back in France—fair bright France. We are back safe and well; and happy days must be for us yet."

"I wonder," said Jean Charost, thoughtfully, "who has kept up the place so carefully."

We left only poor old Augustin, and he is incapable of much exertion. The friendly offices of Jacques Cœur must have had a hand in this."

"Not much, sir," said a voice behind him; "if that very excellent gentleman will permit me to say so."

Jean Charost turned round, and perceived Jacques Cœur himself entering the hall, with a stout little man in a gardener's habit. I say a gardener's habit, because, in those blessed days, called the good old times, which had their excellences as well as their defects, you could tell a man's trade, calling, profession, or degree—at least usually—by his dress. It was a good habit; it was a beneficial habit; it was an honest habit. You could never mistake a priest for a life-guardsman, nor a shop-boy for a prime minister—nor the reverse. In our own times, alas!—in our days of liberty (approaching license), equality (founded upon the grossest delusion), and fraternity (which, as far as we have seen it carried, is the fraternity of Cain), we are allowed to disguise ourselves as we will,

to sail under any false colours that may suit us, to cheat, and swindle, and lie, and deceive, in whatever garb may seem best fitted for our purpose. The vanity and hypocrisy of the multitude have triumphed, not only over sumptuary laws, but in a great part over custom itself; and I know nothing that a man may not assume, except the Queen's crown; and God protect that for her, and for her race, for ever.

The gardener's habit, however, with the blue cloth stockings bound on with leathern straps, was so apparent in the present instance, that Jean Charost, who was unconscious of having a gardener, could not for an instant conceive who the personage was, till the face of Martin Grille, waxen, like that of the moon at the end of the second quarter, grew distinct to recollection.

"He says truly my good friend Monsieur de Brecey," said Jacques Cœur; "and right glad I am that his care should have so provided that the first sight of your own house on return from captivity should be a pleasant one. The

only share I have had in this, as your agent, has been to do what he would."

"'Tis explained in a word, sir," said Martin Grille. "You told me you could not afford to keep me while you were a prisoner, and I thought I could afford to keep myself out of the waste ground about the castle, and keep the castle in good order too. I had always a fancy for gardening when I was a boy, and had once a whole crop of beans in an old saucepan, on the top of the garret where my mother lived in Paris. The first five sous I ever had in my life was for an ounce of onion-seed which I raised in a cracked pitcher. I was intended by Nature for digging the earth, and not for digging holes in other people's bodies; and the town of Bourges owes me some of the best cabbages that ever were grown, when I am quite sure I should have reaped anything but a crop of glory, if I had cultivated the fields of war. However, here I am, ready to take up the trade of valet again, if you will let me; and, to show I have not forgotten the old

mystery, I rubbed up all your arms last night, brushed coats, mantles, jerkins, hous-seaux, and everything else I could find, and swept up every room in the house to save poor old Augustine's unbendable back."

In more ways than one, the house was well prepared for the return of its lord; and, thanks to the care of good Martin Grille, a very comfortable supper had not been forgotten. It was a strange sensation, however, for Jean Charost when the sun had gone, and the sconces were lighted, to sit down once more in his own hall, a free man, with friendly faces all about him—a pleasant sensation, and yet somewhat overpowering. The tears stood in Madame de Brecy's eyes more than once during that evening; but Agnes, whose spirits were light, and who had fewer memories, was full of joyfulness.

Jean Charost himself was very calm; but he often thought that, had he been alone, he could have wept too.

Thus, some thought and some feeling was


given to personal things; but the fate, the state, the history, of his country during his absence, occupied no small portion of his attention. In those days news travelled slowly. Great facts were probably more accurately stated and known than even now; for there was no complicated machinery for the dissemination of falsehood, no public press wielded by party spirit for the purpose of adulterating the true with the false. A certain generosity, too, had survived the pure chivalrous ages, and men, even during life, could attribute high and noble qualities to an enemy—but details were generally lost. Jean Charost was anxious to hear those details; and, when they gathered round the great chimney and the blazing hearth—for it was now October, and the nights were frosty—Jacques Cœur undertook to give his young friend some account of all that had taken place in France since the battle of Azincourt, somewhat to the following effect.

“You remember well, my friend,” he said, “that, after the fall of Harfleur, John of Bur-

gundy only escaped the name of traitor by a luke-warm offer to join his troops to those of France in defence of the realm. But he was distrusted, and probably not without cause. You were already a prisoner in England, when the Orleanist party obtained entire preponderance at the court; and, the young Duke being in captivity like yourself, the leading of that faction was assumed by his father-in-law the count of Armagnac. Rapid, great, and perilous was his rise, and fearless, bold, and bloody he showed himself. The sword of Constable placed the whole military power of France at his disposal; and the death of the Dauphin and Louis left him no rival in authority or favor. Happy had it been for him had he contented himself with military authority; but he must grasp the finances too; and, in the disastrous state of the revenues of the crown, the imposts, only justified by a hard necessity, raised him up daily enemies. His rude and merciless severity, too, irritated even more than it alarmed; and it was not long before all those who had been indifferent, went to swell the ranks of his

adversaries. True, his party was strong: true, the hatred of the Burgundian faction was intense in a multitude of Frenchmen; but the great lords, and many of the princes attached to the house of Orleans, were absent and powerless in English prisons. By every means that policy and duplicity could suggest, John of Burgundy strove to augment the number of his friends. All those who fled from the persecution of Armagnac, were received by him with joy, and treated with distinction. He increased his forces; he hovered about Paris; he treated the orders of the court to retire, if not with contempt, with disobedience. At length, however, he seemed to give up the hope of making himself master of the capital, and retreated suddenly into Artois.

“Not judging his enemy rightly, the Count of Armagnac resolved to seize the opportunity of an open path, in order to strike a blow for the recovery of Harfleur; and, leaving a strong garrison in Paris, he set out upon his expedition. No sooner was he gone, than John of Burgundy hastened to profit by his absence;



and rapid negotiations took place between him and his partizans within the walls of Paris. You know the turbulent and factious nature of the lower order of citizens in the capital. Many of them were animated with mistaken zeal for the house of Burgundy: more were eager for plunder, or thirsty for blood; and one of the darkest and most detestable plots that ever blackened the page of history, was formed for the destruction of the whole Armagnac party, and that, too, with the full cognizance of the Duke of Burgundy. It was dertermined that, at a certain hour, the whole of the conspirators should appear in arms in the streets of Paris, seize upon the Queen, the King, and the young Dauphin, John, murder the whole of the Armagnac faction, and, after having seized the Duke of Berri and the King of Sicily, load then with chains, make a spectacle of them in the streets of Paris, mounted on an ox, and then put them to death.

“The plot was frustrated by the fears, or

remorse, of a woman, within a few minutes of the hour appointed for its execution. Precautions were taken, the Royal family placed in safety, and Tanneguy du Chatel, at the head of his troops, issued forth from the Bastille, and made himself master of the houses and the persons of the conspirators. There was no mercy, my friend, for any one who was found in arms. Some suffered by the cord or the hatchet ; some were drowned in the Seine ; and Armagnac, returning, added, to the chastisement already inflicted on individuals, the punishment of the whole city of Paris. Suspicion was received as proof, indifference became a crime, the prisons were filled to overflowing, and the very name of Burgundian was proscribed. The troops of the Duke of Burgundy, which had approached the city of Paris, were attacked in the open field, and civil war, in its most desolating aspect, raged all around the metropolis.

“Every sort of evil seemed poured out upon France, as if all the fountains of Heaven’s

wrath were opened to rain woes upon the land. Another Dauphin was snatched away from us, and rumors of poison were very general; but the death of one prince was very small in comparison with the treason of another. There is no doubt, de Brecey, that John of Burgundy, frustrated in his attempt upon Paris, entered into a league with the enemies of his country, and secretly recognised Henry of England as King of France. Dissensions arose between the Queen and the Count of Armagnac, in which our last Dauphin, Charles, was so far compromised as to incur the everlasting hatred of his mother. Burgundy, the Queen, and England, united for the destruction of the Dauphin and the Count of Armagnac, and vengeance and ambition combined for the final ruin of the country. The politic King of England took advantage of all, and marched on from conquest to conquest throughout Normandy, while, by slow degrees, the Duke of Burgundy approached nearer and nearer to the capital.

“The perils by which he was surrounded appeared to deprive Armagnac of judgment: he seemed possessed of the fury of a wild beast; and little doubt exists that he meditated a general massacre of the citizens of Paris. But his crimes were cut short by the crimes of others. The troops of Burgundy were in possession of Pontoise. A well-disposed and peaceable young man, insulted and injured by a follower of Armagnac, found means to introduce the Count's enemies into the city of Paris. At the first cry of Burgundy, thousands rose to deliver themselves from the tyranny under which they groaned; and, headed by a man named Caboché, retaliated, in a most fearful manner, on the party of Armagnac, the evils which it had inflicted. The prisons were filled: the streets ran with blood; and the Count Armagnac himself, forced to fly, was concealed for a few hours by a mason, only to be delivered up in the end. The Queen and the Duke of Burgundy encouraged the massacre; the prisons were broken into, the prisoners

murdered in cold blood; the Chatelet was set on fire, the unhappy captives within its walls were driven back into the flames at the point of the pike, and the leaders of the Armagnac faction were dragged through the streets for days before they were torn to pieces by the people.

“Tanneguy du Chatel alone showed courage and discretion, and obtained safety, if not success. He rescued the Dauphin in the midst of the tumult, placed him in safety at Melun, returned to the capital, fought gallantly for some hours against the insurgents and the troops of Burgundy, and then retired to council and support his Prince. The Queen and the Duke of Burgundy entered the city in triumph, flowers were strewed before her on the blood-stained streets, and a Prince of the blood royal of France was seen grasping familiarly hands of the low-born murderers.

“But the powers that he had raised into

active virulence were soon found ungovernable by the Duke of Burgundy ; and he determined first to weaken and then to destroy them. The bands of assassins fancied themselves soldiers because they were butchers, and demanded to be led against the enemy. The Duke was right willing to gratify them, and sent forth two bands of many thousands each. The first was beaten and cut to pieces by the Armagnac troops. The remnant murdered their leaders in the rage of disappointment ; but did not profit by the experience they had gained. The second party were defeated with terrible loss, and fled in haste to Paris ; but the gates were shut against them ; and, dispersing, they joined the murderous bands of plunderers that infested the country, and were pursued and slaughtered by the troops of Burgundy.

“ Thus weakened, the insurgents, who had brought back the Duke of Burgundy to Paris, were easily subjugated by the Duke himself ; their leaders perished on the scaffold, and

thousands of the inferior villains were swept away by various indirect means.

“A still more merciless scourge, however, than either Armagnac or Burgundy, was about to smite the devoted city—a scourge that spared no party, respected no rank or station. The plague appeared in the capital, and, in the space of a few months, the grave received more than a hundred thousand persons of every age, class, and sex. In some of these events perished Caboche, the uncle of your servant, Martin Grille; who, with the courage of a lion, and the fierceness of a tiger, combined some talents which, better employed, might have won him an honorable name in history.”

“And what has become of his son?” asked Jean Charost. “He was attached, I think, to the court of the Queen.”

“He left her,” answered Jacques Cœur, “and came hither to Bourges with Marie of Anjou, the wife of the Dauphin, when that Prince removed from Melun to Bourges. You

know a portion of what happened after—how that Prince was driven hence to Poitiers ; how negotiations took place to re-unite the Royal family ; how divided counsels, ambitions, and jealousies prevented anything like union against the real enemy of France ; how, step by step, the English King made himself master of all the country, almost to the gates of Paris. You were present, I am told, at the death of the Duke of Burgundy. Shall I, or shall I not, call it his murder ? Well had he deserved punishment. Well had he justified almost any means to deliver France from the blasting influence of his ambition. But, at the very moment chosen for vengeance, he showed some repentance for his past crimes, some inclination to make atonement ; and perhaps the very effects of his remorse placed his life in the hands of his adversaries. Would to God that act had not been committed !”

“And what has followed ?” asked Jean Charost. “I have heard but little since, except that at Arras a treaty was concluded, by

which the crown of France was virtually transferred to the King of England on his marriage with the Princess Catherine."

"The scene is confused and indistinct," replied Jacques Cœur, "like the advance of a cloud overshadowing the land, and leaving everything vague and misty behind it. Far from serving the cause of the Dauphin, far from serving the cause of France, the death of the Duke of Burgundy has produced unmitigated evil to all. His son has considered vengeance rather than justice—the memory of his father, rather than the happiness of his country. Leagued with the Queen, and with the King of England, he has sought nothing but the destruction of the Dauphin, and has seen the people of France swear allegiance to a foreign conqueror whom his connivance enabled to triumph. From conquest to conquest, the King of England has gone on, till almost all the northern half of France is his; and the river Loire is the boundary between

two distinct kingdoms. Here and there, indeed, a large town and a strong fortress is possessed by one party in the districts where the other dominates; and a border warfare is carried on on the banks of the river.

“But, for a long time previous to King Henry’s death, Fortune seemed to follow wherever he trod, and the whole western, as well as the northern, parts of France were being gradually reduced beneath his sway. During a short absence in England, indeed, a false promise of success shone upon the arms of the Dauphin: a reinforcement of six thousand men from Scotland enabled him to keep the field with success; and the victory of Beaugé, the death of the Duke of Clarence, and the relief of Angers, gave hope to every loyal heart in France. Money, indeed, was wanting, and I was straining every nerve to obtain for my Prince the means of carrying on the war, when the return of Henry, and his rapid successes in Saintonge, and the Limousin, cut

me off from a large part of the resources I had calculated upon, and once more plunged us all into despair.

“The last effort in arms was the siege of Cone on the Loire garrisoned by the Burgundian troops. The Dauphin presented himself before its walls in person, and the young Duke of Burgundy marched to its relief, calling on his English allies for aid. Henry was not slow to grant it, and set out from Senlis to show his readiness and his friendship. Death struck him, it is true, by the way ; but even in death he seemed to conquer, and Cone was relieved as he breathed his last at Vincennes. Happily have you escaped, de Brecey ; for had the Lord Willoughby received intimation of his King’s dying commands before he freed you, you would have lingered many a long year in prison. Well knowing that the captives of Azincourt would afford formidable support to the party of the Dauphin as soon as liberated, it has been always Henry’s policy to detain them in London, and almost his last words were an order not to

set them free till his infant son had attained his majority. You are the only one, I believe, above the rank of a simple esquire who has been permitted to return to France."

"I owe it all to this dear girl," answered Jean Charost, laying his hand upon the little hand of Agnes. "She went to plead for me at a happy moment. But where is the Dauphin now? He needs the arm of every gentleman in France, and I will not be long absent from his army."

"Army!" echoed Jacques Cœur, with a melancholy shake of the head. "Alas, de Breoy, he has no army. Dispirited, defeated, almost penniless, seeing the fairest portion of his father's dominions in the hands of an enemy—that father's name an authority used against him—his own mother his most rancorous foe—the Duke of Burgundy at the head of one army in the field, and the Duke of Bedford, hardly inferior to the great Henry, leading another, he has retired almost hopeless to the lonely castle of Polignac, and strives, I am

told, but strives in vain, to forget the adversities of the past and the menaces of the future in empty pleasures.

“An attempt must be made to rouse him; but I can do nothing till I have obtained those means, without which all action would be hopeless. To Paris I dare not venture, myself; but I have agents there, friends who will aid me, and wealth locked up in many enterprizes. Diligently have I laboured during the last month to gather all resources together; but still I linger on in Bourges without receiving any answer to my numerous letters.”

“Cannot I go to Paris?” asked Jean Charost. “You know, my friend, that I want no diligence, and had once some skill in such business as yours.”

Jacques Cœur paused thoughtfully, and then answered:

“It might perhaps be as well. You have been so long absent, that your person would be unknown. When could you set out?”

Jean Charost replied that he would go the

very next day ; and the conversation was still proceeding upon these plans, when the sound of a horse's feet was heard in the Castle court, and, in a minute or two after, a tall, elderly, weather-beaten man was brought in by Martin Grille. Jean Charost looked at him, thinking he recognised the face of Armand Chauvin, the chevaucheur of the late Duke of Orleans. The man walked straight up to Jacques Cœur, put a letter in his hand, and then turned his eyes to the floor without giving one glance to those around.

“ This is good news, indeed,” said Jacques Cœur, who had read the letter by the light of a sconce. “ A hundred thousand crowns, and two hundred thousand more in a month ! What with this, and the money from Marseilles, we may do something yet. This is good news, indeed !”


“ I have more news yet,” said Chauvin, gravely. “ Hark in your ear, Messire Jacques. I have hardly eaten or drank, and have not slept a wink from the gates of Paris to Bourges, and Bourges hither, all to bring you these tid-

ings speedily. Hark in your ear." And he whispered something to Jacques Cœur. The other listened attentively, gave a very slight start, and appeared somewhat, but not greatly moved.

"God rest his soul!" he said, at length.
"He has had a troublous life. God rest his soul!"

CHAPTER V.

WHO has not heard of the beautiful Allier ? Who has not heard of the magnificent Auvergne ? But the horseman stopped not to gaze at the mountains round him. He lingered not upon the banks of the stream ; he hardly gave more than a glance at the rich Limagne. At Clermont, indeed, he halted for two whole hours ; but it was an enforced halt, for his horse broke down with hard riding, and all the time was spent in purchasing another. A crust of bread and a cup of wine afforded all the refreshment he himself took ; and on he went through the vineyards and the orchards loaded with the last fruits of autumn. At Issoire he gave his horse hay and water, and then rode on at great speed to Lempde, but passed by its mighty basaltic rock, crowned with its Castle,



though he looked up with feelings of interest and regret, as he connected it with the memory of Louis of Orleans.

At Brioude he was forced to pause for a while. But his horse fed quickly, and on he went again, out of the narrow streets of that straggling, disagreeable town, over the mountains, through the valleys, with vast volcanic forms all around him, and hamlets and villages, built of the dark, grey lava, hardly distinguishable from the rocks on which they stood. More than seventy miles he rode on straight from Clermont, and drew not a rein between Brioude and Puy which burst upon his sight suddenly on the eastern declivity of the mountains, with its rich, unrivalled amphitheatre, and its three rivers flowing away at the foot. The sun was within a hand's breath of the horizon. All the valleys seen from that elevation were flooded with light; the old Cathedral itself looked like a resplendent amethyst; and devout pilgrims to the miraculous shrine still crowded the streets some turning on their way homewards, som

mounting the innumerable steps to say one prayer more at the feet of the Virgin.

Jean Charost rode straight to the little old inn—small and miserable as compared with many of the vast buildings appropriated in those days to the reception of travellers in France, and still smaller in proportion to the number of devout persons who daily flocked into the city. But then the landlord argued that pilgrims came for grace, and not for good living, and that therefore the body must put up with what it could get, if the soul was taken care of. De Brecy passed under the archway into the courtyard, gave his horse to an hostler of precisely the same stamp as the man who afforded a type to Shakspeare, and then, turning back towards the street, met the host in the way, who was prepared to tell him that he must wait long for supper, and put up with a garret.

“I want nothing at present, my good friend,” replied Jean Charost, “but a cup of wine, which is ready at all times, and some one to show me my way on foot to Espaly. In-

deed, I should not have turned in here at all, but that my horse could go no farther."

"Ah, sir," observed the host, with his civility and curiosity both awakened together, "so you are going to see Monseigneur le Dauphin. News, now, I warrant, and good, I hope. Pray what is it?"

"Excellent good," replied Jean Charost. "First, that a thirsty man talks ill with a dry mouth; and secondly, that a wise man never gives his message except to the person it is sent to. The Dauphin will be delighted with those tidings; and so now give me a cup of wine, and some one to show me the way."

"Ha! you are a wag," said the landlord. "But hark'ee, sir; you had better take my mule. It will be ready while I am drawing the wine, and you drinking it. Though they say 'Espaly, near Puy,' it is not so near as they call it. My boy shall go with you on a quick-trotting ass, to bring back the mule."

"And the news," said Jean Charost, "if he can get it. So be it, however; for, good sooth,

I am tired. I have not slept a wink for six and thirty hours. But let them make all haste."

"As quick as an avalanche, sir," said the landlord; "and God speed you if you bring good news to our noble Prince. He loves wine and women, and is exceedingly devout to the blessed Virgin of Puy; so all men should wish him well, and all ladies too."

The landlord did really make haste; and, in less than ten minutes, Jean Charost was on his way to Espaly along a sort of natural volcanic causeway which paves the bottom of the deep valley. The sun was behind the hills; but still a cool and pleasant light was spread over the sky; and the towers of the old castle, with their many weather-cocks, and a banner displayed on the top of the donjon rising high above the little village at the foot of the rock, seemed to catch some of the last rays of the sun, and

"Flash back again the western blaze,
In lines of dazzling light."

The ascent was steep, however, and longer than Jean Charost had expected. It was dim twilight when he approached the gates; but little guard was kept around this last place of refuge of the son of France. Nested in the mountains of Auvergne, with a long expansive country between him and his enemies, Charles had no fear of attack. The gates were wide open: not a solitary sentinel guarded the way; and Jean Charost rode into the court-yard, looking round in vain for some one to address. Not a soul was visible. He heard the sound of a lute and a voice singing from one of the towers, and a merry peal of laughter from a long, low building on the right of the great court. But, besides this, there was nothing to show that the Castle was inhabited, till, just as he was dismounting, a page, gaily tricked out in blue and silver, crossed from one tower towards another with a bird-cage in his hand.


"Ho, boy!" cried Jean Charost. "Can you tell me where I shall find the servant of Mademoiselle de St. Geran, or can you tell her

yourself that the Seigneur de Brecy wishes to speak with her?"

"Come with me—come with me, Beau Sire," said the boy, with all the flippant gaiety of a page. "I am going to her with this bird from his Highness, and this castle is the abode of liberty and joy. All iron coats and stiff habitudes have been cast down in the chapel, and a vow against idle ceremony is made by every one under the great gate."

"Well then, lead on," said Jean Charost. "My business might well abridge ceremony, if any did exist. Wait here till I return," he continued, speaking to the innkeeper's son; and then followed the page upon his way.

The tower to which the boy led him was a building of considerable size, although it looked diminutive by the side of the great donjon, with which it was connected by a long gallery in a sort of traverse commanding the entrance of the outer gate. The door stood open, like most of the other doors throughout the place, and led into an old vaulted passage,



from the middle of which rose a narrow and steep stair-case of gray stone. A rope was twisted round the pillar on which the stair-case turned, and it was somewhat necessary at that moment ; for, to say sooth, both passage and stair-case were as dark as the pit of Acheron.

Feeling his way, the boy ascended till he came to a door on the first floor of the tower, which he opened without ceremony. The interior of the room which this sudden movement displayed, though darkness was fast falling over the earth, was clear and light compared with the shadowy air of the stair-case ; and Jean Charost could see, seated thoughtfully at the window, that lovely, and never-to-be-forgotten form which he had last beheld at Monterreau.

Agnes Sorel either did not hear the opening of the door, or judged that the comer was some of the ordinary attendants of the place ; for she remained motionless, plunged in deep meditation, with her eyes raised to a solitary

star, the vanward leader of the host of heaven, which was becoming brighter and brighter every moment as it rose high above the black masses of the Anis mountain.

"Madam, here is a bird for you, which his Highness has sent," said the page, abruptly. "Some say it is a nightingale; and, though his coat is not fine, he sings deliciously."

Agnes Sorel turned as the boy spoke; but she looked not at him, nor at the cage, nor at the bird: for her eyes instantly rested upon the figure of Jean Charost, as he was advancing towards her from the door. Though what light there was fell full upon him through the open window, it was too dark for her to distinguish his features; but his voice she knew, as soon as he spoke, though she had heard it but rarely. There are some sounds which linger in the ear of memory—echoes of the past, as it were—which instantly carry us back to other days, and recal circumstances, thoughts, and feelings long gone by, with a brightness

which needs no eye to see them but the eye of the mind. The voice of Jean Charost was a very peculiar voice, soft, full, and mellow; but rounded and distinct, like one of the tones of an organ, possessing—if such a thing be permitted me to say—a melody in itself.

“Monsieur de BreCY!” she exclaimed. “I am rejoiced to see you here. No longer a prisoner, I hope. No longer seeking ransom, but a free man. Yet what brings you to this remote corner of the earth? Some generous motive, doubtless. Patriotism, perhaps, and love of your Prince. Alas, de BreCY! patriotism finds cold welcome where pleasure reigns alone; and as to love—would to God your Prince loved himself as others love him!”


“What shall I say to his Highness, madam?” asked the boy, whom she had hardly noticed. “What shall I say about the bird?”

“Tell him,” replied Agnes, rising quickly from her seat, “tell him that, if I am a good instructor, I will teach that bird to sing a song which shall rouse all France in arms. Ay,

little as it is, and feeble as may be its voice, I am not more powerful, my voice is not more strong; and yet—I hope—I hope—get thee gone, boy. Tell his Highness what I have said. Tell him what you will. Say I am half mad, if it please you; for so I am, to sit here idling, looking at that mountain and that star, while I know that the banners of England are waving triumphant over the bloody fields of France. Well, de Brecey, well,” she continued, as the boy retired, and closed the door, “what news from the Court of the Conquerors? What news from the proud city of London? We have lost our Henry; but we have got a John in exchange. What matters Christian names in these unchristian times? A Plantagenet is a Plantagenet; and the race is an iron one to deal with, and requires more steel, I fear, than we have left in France.”

“My news, dear lady,” replied Jean Charost, “is not from London, but from Paris.”

“Well, what of Paris then?” asked Agnes Sorel, in an indifferent tone, taking another



seat partly turned from the window. "Let me ask you to ring that bell upon the table. It is growing dark. We must have lights. One star is not enough, bright as it may be—even the star of love—one star is not enough to give us light in this darksome world."

Jean Charost rang the bell; but, before any attendant could appear, he said, hurriedly—

"Dear lady, listen to me for one moment: I bring important news."

"Good or bad?" asked Agnes Sorel, quickly.

"One half is unmingled good," answered Jean Charost. "The other is of a mixed nature, full of hope, yet alloyed with sorrow."

"Even that is better than any we have lately had," remarked Agnes. "Nevertheless, I am a woman, de Brecey, and fond of joy. Give me the unmingled first. We will temper it hereafter."

"Well then, dear lady, I am sent to tell his

Highness, from our good friend Jacques Cœur, that a hundred thousand crowns of the sun are by this time waiting his pleasure at Moulins, and that two hundred thousand more will be there in one month."

"Joy—joy!" cried Agnes, clasping her hands. "Oh, this is joyful indeed! But then," she added, in a grave and thoughtful tone. "Heaven send that it be used aright. I fear—oh, I fear—nay, nay, I will fear no more! It is *undeserved* misfortune which crushes the noble heart, bows the brave spirit, and takes its energy away from greatness. Have you told him, de Brecy? What did he say? How did he look? Not with light joy, I hope; but with grave, expectant satisfaction, as a Prince should look who finds his people's deliverance nigher than he thought."

"I have not seen his Highness," replied de Brecy. "First, because I knew not well how to gain admission, and secondly, because I wished that you should have the opportunity of telling him

of a change of fortunes, hoping—knowing—that you would direct his first impulses aright.”

“I—I?” exclaimed Agnes. “Oh, de Brecey, de Brecey! I am unworthy of such a task! How shoul *I* direct any one aright? Yet it matters not: whatever I be—weak, frail, faulty as I am—the courage and resolution, the energy and the purpose, which once possessed me solely, shall, all that is left, be given to him and to France. One error shall not blot out all that is good in my nature. Ha! here come the lights.”

She paused for a moment or two, while the servant entered, placed lights upon the table and retired; and then, in a much calmer tone, resumed the discourse.

“I have been much moved to-day,” she said; “but even this brief pause of thought has been sufficient to show me the right way. Lights, you have done me service,” she added,

with a graceful smile. "Come, de Brecy, I will lead you to her who alone is worthy and fitted to give these good tidings—to my friend—to my dear friend—the Princess, his wife."

"But you have forgotten," replied Jean Charost. "I have other news to tell."

"Ha!" she ejaculated; "and that mingled. I did forget, indeed. Say what it is, de Brecy. We must not raise up hopes to dash them down again."

"That will not be the effect," said de Brecy. "The news I have is sad, yet full of hope. That which has been wanting, on the side of his Highness and of France in this terrible struggle against foreign enemies and internal traitors, has been the King's name. In his powerless incapacity, the mighty influence of the Monarch's authority has been arrayed against the friends, and for the foes, of France. Dear lady, it will be so no more!"

"No more!" exclaimed Agnes, eagerly, and with her whole face lighting up. "Has he

been snatched from their hands, then? Tell me, de Brecey, How? When? Where? But you look grave, nay sad. Is the King dead?"

"Charles the Sixth is dead," answered de Brecey. "But Charles the Seventh lives to deliver France."

"Stay, stay!" said Agnes Sorel, seating herself again, and putting her hand thoughtfully to her brow. "Poor King! poor man! May the grave give him peace! Oh, what a life was his, de Brecey! Full of high qualities and kindly feelings, born to the throne of the finest realm in all the world, adored by his people, how bright were once his prospects! And who would ever have thought that the life thus begun would be passed in misery, madness, sickness, and neglect—that his power should be used for his own destruction, and that his name should lead his enemies to battle against his son; that his wife should contemn, despise and ill treat him, and his daughter wed his bitterest foe; that he should only wake

from his insane trances, to see his kinsman murdered almost before his face ; that all his sons but one should pass to the tomb before him—perchance by poison—and that he himself should follow before he reached old age, without that tendance in his lingering sickness which the common mechanic receives from affection, the beggar from charity ? Oh, what a destiny !”

“ We might well weep for his life,” said de Brecy ; “ but we cannot mourn his death. To him it was a blessing. To France it may be deliverance. This news, however, you have now to carry to the King.”

“ True, true,” cried Agnes. Then she paused a moment, and repeated his last words with a thoughtful and anxious look. “ To the King !” she exclaimed. “ To the King ! No, I will take it to the Queen, de Brecy. Come you with me, in case of question, and to receive those honors and rewards which are meet for him who brings such tidings. Ay, let us speak it plainly—such *good* tidings. For on those few words, ‘ Charles the Sixth is

dead,' depends, I do believe, the salvation of our France."

As she spoke, she rose and moved towards the door, and de Brécý followed her down the staircase, and through the long passage which connected the tower with the donjon. The yellow autumn moon peeped up above the hills, and poured its light upon them through the tall windows as they went. A solemn feeling was in their hearts, which prevented them from uttering a word.

The way was somewhat long ; but at last Agnes stopped before a door, and knocked. The sweet voice of Marie of Anjou bade them come in ; and Agnes opened the door.

" Ah, my Agnes," cried the Princess, " have you come to cheer me ? I know not how it is, but I have felt very sad to-night. I have been moralising, dear girl ; and thinking how much happier I should have been had we possessed nothing but this castle, and the demesne around, mere lords of a little patrimony, instead of seeing kingdoms called our own, but to be

snatched from us. France seems going the way of Sicily, my Agnes. But who is this you have with you? His face seems known to me."

"You have seen him once before, madam," said Agnes. "He is the bringer of great tidings. But no lips except mine must give them to my Queen." And, advancing gracefully, she knelt at the feet of Marie of Anjou, and kissed her hand, saying:—"Madame, you are Queen of France. His Majesty Charles the Sixth has departed."

The Queen stood as one stupified; for, so often had the unfortunate King been reported ill, and then recovered—so little was known of his real state beyond the walls of the Hotel St. Pol, and so slow was the progress of information in that part of France—that not a suspicion of the impending event had been entertained in the *Chateau* of Espaly. After gazing in the face of Agnes for a moment, she cast down her eyes to the ground, remained for a brief space in deep thought, and then exclaimed—

"But, after all, what is my lord? A King almost without dominions, a General without an army, a ruler without power or means. Rise, rise, dear Agnes." And, casting her arms round her neck, Marie of Anjou shed tears.

These certainly were not tears of sorrow for the departed; for she was little acquainted with the late King: we do not even know from history that she had ever seen him. But all sudden emotions have voice, generally, in laughter or in tears. It has often been remarked that joy has its tears as well as sorrow; but few have ever scanned deeply the fountain-source from which those tears arise. Is it not that the sudden contrast between happiness and grief relieves, as it were, the long repressed spring of deep emotions, and that, like those of a sealed fountain unconsciously opened, they burst forth at once, to sparkle, perhaps, in the sunshine of the hour, yet with all the chilliness of the depths from which they arise?

Marie of Anjou recovered herself speedily, and Agnes Sorel, rising from her knee, held out her hand to Jean Charost, and presented him to the Queen, saying—

“He brings you happier tidings, madam—tidings which I trust may give power to the sceptre just fallen into his Majesty’s hand—ay, and edge his sword to smite his enemies when they least expect it. By the skill, and by the zeal, of one I may venture to call your friend, as well as mine—noble Jacques Cœur—the means which have been so long wanting to make at least one generous effort on behalf of France, are now secured. Speak, de Brecy—speak ; and tell her Majesty the joyful news you bear.”

Jean Charost told his tale simply, and well ; and, when he had concluded, the Queen, with all traces of sorrow passed away, exclaimed—

“Let us hasten, dear Agnes, and carry the news to my husband. There be some men fitted for prosperity, and he is one. Misfortune depresses him ; but this news will

restore him all his energies. Oh, this castle of Espaly ! It has seemed to me a dungeon of the spirit, where chains were around the soul, and the fair daylight of Hope came but as a ray through the loop-hole of a cell. Come with me—come with me, my friends. I need no attendants but you two.”

Jean Charost raised a light from the table, and opened the door, then followed along the dark passages till the party reached a small hall upon the ground-floor, which the Queen entered, without waiting for announcement or permission. Her light step roused no one within from occupation ; and the whole scene was before her eyes ere any person engaged in it was aware of her presence. She might, perhaps, have seen another less tranquil to look upon.

At a table, under a sconce, in one corner of the room, sat a young man, reading the contents of a book richly illuminated. His cap and plume were thrown down by his side, his

sword was cast upon a bench near, and his head was bent over the volume with his eyes eagerly fixed upon the page, decyphering, probably with difficulty, the words which it presented. In another corner of the room, far removed from the light, and with his shoulders supported by the angle of the building, sat Tanneguy du Chatel, sound asleep, but with his heavy sword resting on his knees, and his left hand lying upon the scabbard. Nearer to the windows—seven paces, probably, in advance—stood a boy, dressed as a page, looking at what was going on at a table before him, but not venturing to approach too near. At that table, with a large *candélabre* in the centre, sat a young gentleman of powerful frame, though still a mere lad, with a light mustachio on the upper lip, and his strong black hair curling round his forehead and temples. On the opposite side of the table, nearest to the page, was Charles the Seventh himself. He was the only one in the room who wore his cap and plume; and to the eyes of Jean Charost—

whether from prepossession or not, I cannot tell —there seemed an air of dignity and grace about his youthful figure, which well befitted the monarch. All thoughts of France, however, were evidently far away; and his whole attention seemed directed to the narrow board before him, on which he was playing at chess with his cousin, the after celebrated Dunois.

Still the step of the Queen and her companions did not rouse him: his whole soul seemed in the move he was about to make; and it was not till they were close by, that he even looked round. Even then he did not speak, but turned his eyes upon the game again, and in the end moved his knight so as to protect the king.

“That is a good move,” said his wife, taking a step forward. “But some such move must be made speedily, my Lord, upon a wider board.” Then, bending her knee, she added, “God save his Majesty, King Charles the Seventh!”

Charles started up, nearly overturning the board, and deranging all the pieces.

“What is it, Marie?” he asked, looking almost aghast; but Agnes Sorel and Jean Charost knelt at the same time, saying,


“God save your Majesty! He has done His will with your late father.”

Up started Dunois, and waved his hand in the air, exclaiming—

“God save the King!” And the other three in the chamber pressed around, repeating the same cry.

Charles stood in the midst, gazing gravely on the different faces about him; then slowly drew his sword from the scabbard, and laid it on the table, saying, in a calm, thoughtful, resolute tone—

“Once more!”



CHAPTER VI.

How the news spread through the castle, I know not ; but Charles the Seventh had hardly recovered from the first surprise of the intelligence, when, without waiting for permission or ceremony, all, whose station justified their admission to the presence of the Prince, crowded into the little hall of Espaly. A brilliant and beautiful sight it presented at that moment ; for it was a court of youth and beauty ; and not more than two or three persons present had seen thirty years of age. Hope and enthusiasm were in every countenance, and the heavy beams of the vaulted roof rang with the cries of—

“ Long live the King ! ”

The bearer of the intelligence which had

caused the acclamation, seemed likely to be altogether forgotten by the monarch in the gratulations which poured upon him ; but some bold, frank words of the young and heroic Lord of la Hire gave to generous Agnes Sorel an opportunity of calling the attention of Charles to Jean Charost.

“ Ay, God save the King !” cried la Hire, warmly, “ and send him some more crowns in his purse to secure the one upon his head.”

Agnes whispered something to the young Queen ; and Marie of Anjou turned gracefully towards de Brecy, saying—

“ This gentleman, my Lord, has something to tell your Majesty on that score.”

“ He is the messenger of good tidings, sir,” urged Agnes Sorel ; “ but, perhaps, your Majesty forgets him. He was the trusted friend of your uncle of Orleans : he was wounded and made prisoner at Azincourt ; and his first steps upon French ground, after his liberation, bring you tidings of dignity, and

the promise of success. Speak, Monsieur de Brecey. Tell his Majesty the good news you have in store."

Charles the Seventh fixed his eyes upon Jean Charost, and a shade came over his face, not of displeasure, indeed, but of deep melancholy. It is probable the memories awakened by the sight, as soon as he recognized him, were very sorrowful. The bloody bridge of Monterreau, the dying Duke of Burgundy, and all the fearful acts of a day never to be forgotten, came back to memory. The impression, however, was but momentary; and when he heard the tidings which de Brecey bore, of present relief, and of the prospect of large future supplies, and was made aware that he had also brought the news of his being King of France, he smiled graciously upon him, saying—

"How can we reward you, Monsieur de Brecey? Few kings have less means than we have."

At that moment Tanneguy du Chatel (to whose disinterested character, history, dwelling

on his faults, has not done full justice) came forward, and laid his hand upon Jean Charost's shoulder, saying—

“Give him St. Florent, Sire, which we were talking about the other day. Its Lord not having appeared for fully fifteen years, the fief has clearly fallen in the demesne of the Crown.”

“But I promised, du Chatel—” said Charles, turning towards him.

“Nevermind that, Sire,” interposed du Chatel, bluffly. “I do not want it. De Brece here has served the crown well, and suffered for his services. So did his father before him, I have been told. He brings you good tidings—good tidings for France also, I do hope. Give him the fief, Sire. If I had it, every one would be jealous. No one will be jealous of him.”

“Well, then, so be it,” said Charles. “The town and castle of St. Florent, near Bourges, Monsieur de Brece, shall be yours; but, by my faith, you must keep them well, for the place is of importance, commanding

the supplies of Bourges. The letters of concession shall be ready for you by to-morrow, and you can do homage before you go, if you will but stay at our Court for a few days."


"I must stay here, Sire, or at Puy, for the arrival of Messire Jacques Cœur," replied Jean Charost. "He has many another scheme for your Majesty's service. In St. Florent I will do my duty, and I humbly and earnestly thank you for the gift."

"Stay here—stay here," said Charles. And then he added, with a faint and melancholy smile—"Our court is not so large as to fill even the Castle of Espaly to overflowing. Some one see that he is well cared for.—And now, lords and ladies, other things are to be thought of. My first thought, so help me Heaven! has been of France, and of what benefit the event which has just happened may prove to her. But I cannot forget that I have lost a father, a kind and noble Prince, whom God has visited with long and sore afflictions; but who never lost the love of his people or of his son. I do

believe, from all that I have heard, that death was to him a blessing and relief; still I must mourn that so sad and joyless a life has ended without one gleam of hope or happiness, even at the close. I had hoped that it might be otherwise—that my sword might have freed him from the durance in which he has been so long kept—that my care and love might have soothed his latest hours. It has been ordered otherwise; and God's will be done! But all to-morrow we will give up to solemn mourning, and the next day take counsel as to instant action."

Thus saying, he took the hand of the Queen in his own, and was retiring from the room, none of the group around him moving, except to give him passage, but one gentleman, who sprang to open the door.

Two persons were left in the midst of the little crowd, not exactly isolated, but in circumstances of some awkwardness. Agnes Sorel, notwithstanding all her influence at the court, notwithstanding all her power over the



mind of the young King, felt that the bonds between herself and those who now surrounded her were very slight, and that there were jealousies and dislikes towards her in the bosoms of many present. But she was relieved from a slight embarrassment by the unvarying kindness of Marie of Anjou. Ere Charles and herself had taken six steps through the hall, the Queen turned her head, saying, with a placid smile—

“Come with us, Agnes; I shall want you.”

“Marvellous, truly!” ejaculated a lady who stood near Jean Charost, speaking in a low tone, as if to herself. “Were I a Queen, methinks I would use the power for vengeance which Heaven sends me, even if I did not seek some myself.”


At the same moment, Tanneguy du Chatel, laying his hand upon Jean Charost’s arm, said—

“You must come with me, de Brecy. You shall be my guest in the Chateau. I have room enough there where I lodge. Wait but a moment till I speak a word or two with these good lords. We must not let the tide of

good fortune ebb again unimproved. The Royal name alone is a great thing for us ; but it may be made to have a triple effect—upon our enemies, upon our friends, and upon the King himself. By my life, this is no time to throw one card out of one's hand."

He spoke for several minutes in a low tone with Dunois, la Hire, Louvet, and others ; and then, returning to the side of Jean Charost, led him down to the outer court, on his way to that part of the building which he himself inhabited. There, patiently waiting by the side of the mule, they found the son of the landlord at Puy. The boy was dismissed speedily, well satisfied, with directions to send up the Baron de Brecey's horse to the Castle the next morning.

The rest of the evening was spent by Jean Charost and Tanneguy du Chatel almost alone. It was not an evening of calm, however ; for the excitable spirit of the Prevôt was much moved with all that had passed ; and, with his prompt and eager impetuosity, he commented



not alone upon the news that had been received, but upon all their probable consequences. Often he would start up and pace the room in a deep reverie; and often he would question his companion upon details into which the King himself had forgotten to inquire.

“The happy moment must not be lost,” he said; “the happy moment must not be lost. The young King’s mind must be kept up to the tone which it has received by this intelligence. —Would to Heaven I could ensure half-an-hour’s conversation with the fair Agnes, just to show her all the consequences of the first great step! But I do not like to ask it; and, after all, she needs no prompting. She is a glorious creature, de Brecy. Heart and soul with her are given to France.”

“Yet there be some,” said Jean Charost, “some, even in this Court, who seem not very well disposed towards her. Did you hear what was said by a lady near me just now?”

“Oh! Joan of Vendôme,” cried Tanneguy, with a laugh. “She is a prescribed railer at

our fair friend. She came to Poitiers two years ago, fancying herself a perfect paragon of beauty, and making up her mind to become the Dauphin's mistress. But he would have nought to say to her faded charms, not even out of courtesy to her husband. So the poor thing is full of spleen, and would kill the beautiful Agnes, if she dared. She is too cowardly for that, however; at least, I trust so."

Jean Charost meditated deeply over his companion's words; and whither his thoughts had led him might be perceived by what he next said.

"Strange," he murmured, "very strange, the conduct of the Queen!"

"Ay, strange enough," answered du Chatel. "We have here, within this little Chateau of Espaly, de Brecey, two women such as the world has rarely ever seen, both young, both beautiful, both gentle. The one has all the courage, the intellect, the vigor of a man; and yet, as we see, a woman's weakness. The other is tender, timid, kind and loving; and


yet without one touch of that selfishness which prompts to what we call jealousy. By the Lord, de Brecy, it has often puzzled me, this conduct of Marie of Anjou. I do believe I could, as readily as any man, sacrifice myself to the happiness of one I love;* but I could not make a friend of my wife's lover. There are things too much for Nature—for human nature, at least. But this girl—her Majesty, I mean—seems to me quite an angel; and the other does, I will say, all that a fallen and repentant angel could, to retain the friendship which she fears she may have forfeited. All that deference, and reverence, and humble, firm attachment can effect to wash away her offence,

* He afterwards nobly proved his devotion to Charles the Seventh by an act which distinguished him more than all the military services he rendered to that Prince. His dismissal from the Court was demanded, as the price of even a partial reconciliation between the King and the young Duke of Burgundy. Charles resisted firmly; but du Chatel voluntarily resigned all his prospects, and retired, to free his master from embarrassment.

she uses towards the Queen ; and I do believe, from my very heart, that no counsel ever given by Agnes Sorel to Marie of Anjou, has any other object upon earth than Marie's happiness. Still, it is all very strange, and the less we say about it the better."

Jean Charost thought so, likewise ; but that conversation brought upon him fits of thought which lasted, with more or less interruption, during the whole evening.

Society, in almost every country, has its infancy, its youth, its maturity, and its old age. At least, such has been the case hitherto. These different states are of longer or shorter duration according to circumstances ; but the several epocha are usually sufficiently marked. The age in which Jean Charost lived was not one of that fine, moralizing tendency which belongs to the maturity of life : it was one of passion and of action, of youth, activity, and indiscretion. Nevertheless, feeling often supplied a guide where reason failed ; and, from some cause, Jean Charost felt pained that he



could not find one character amongst those who surrounded him, sufficiently pure and high to command and obtain his whole esteem. He asked himself that painful question which so often recurs to us before we have obtained from experience, as well as from reason, a knowledge of man's mixed nature: Are there such things as virtue and truth and honour upon earth?"

The next day was passed as a day of mourning; but, on the following morning early, all the nobles in the Castle of Espaly met together in the great hall, and some eager consultations went on amongst them. There were smiles, and gay looks, and many a lively jest; and lances were brought in, and bucklers examined, as if for a tournament.

Jean Charost asked his companion, du Chatel, the meaning of all that he beheld; and the latter replied, with a grave smile—

"Merely a boy's frolic; but one which may have important consequences."

A moment after, the young King himself,

principally habited in scarlet, entered the hall, followed by a number of the ladies and gentlemen of the Court, and received gracefully and graciously the greetings of his subjects; but, an instant after, La Hire and two or three others surrounded and pressed upon him so closely, that Jean Charost thought they were showing scanty reverence towards the King, when suddenly a voice exclaimed—

“Pardon us, Sire!” And, in an instant, spears were crossed, a shield was cast down upon them, and the young Monarch was lifted to a throne which might have befitted one of the predecessors of Charlemagne. Dunois seized a banner embroidered with the arms of France; and, moving on through the doors of the hall into the chapel, the banner was waved three times in the air, and the voices of all present made the roof ring with the shout of, “Long live King Charles the Seventh!”

Almost at the same time, another personage was added to the group around the altar; and

Jacques Cœur himself repeated heartily the cry, adding—

“I have brought with me, Sire—at least, so I trust—the means to make you King of France indeed. It is here in this Chateau, and all safe.”

“Thanks, thanks, my good friend!” said the young King. “We must take counsel together, how it may be used to the best advantage, in order that our deep gratitude shall follow the service, whatever be the result of the use we make of it. And now, lords and ladies, to Poitiers immediately—ay to-morrow morning—to be solemnly crowned in the cathedral there. That city, at least, we can call our own, and there we will deliberate how to recover others.”

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT a dizzy whirlpool is history ! How strange it is to gaze upon it, and see the multitudes of atoms that every instant are rushing forward upon the whirling and struggling waters of Time, borne fiercely along by causes that they know not, but obey ; now catching the light, now plunged into darkness ; agitated, tossed to and fro, turned round in giddy dance, and at length swallowed up in the deep centre of the vortex, where all things disappear ! It is a strange, a terrible, but a salutary, contemplation. No sermon that was ever preached, no funeral oration ever spoken, shows so plainly, brings home to the heart so closely, the emptiness of all human things—the inanity of ambition, the folly of avarice, the weakness of vanity, and the meanness of pride, as the sad


and solemn aspect of history—the record of deeds which have produced nothing but passions that have been all in vain. But there is a book from which all these things will at one time be read ; and then how awful will be the results disclosed !

To the men who write history, however, while floating round in that vortex, and tending onward amidst all their struggles to the one inevitable doom, how light and easy is every transition, how imperceptible the diminution of the circle, as onward, onward they are carried !—how rapid, especially in times of great activity, is the passage of event into event ! Time seems to be stopped in the heat of action ; and Energy, like the Prophet, exclaims : “ *Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon !* ”

It seemed to Jean Charost, when several years had passed, but as a day and night since he had left Agnes and his mother in the Chateau of Brecy, near Bourges. Each day had had its occupation, each hour its thought : the one had

glided into the other; and one deed trod so hastily upon the steps of another, that there was no time to count the time.

Yet, so many great events had happened, that one would have thought the hours upon the dial were marked sufficiently. De Brecy had taken part in battles; he had been employed in negotiations; he had navigated one of the many armed vessels, now belonging to Jacques Cœur, upon the Mediterranean, in search of fresh resources for his King; and one of those hulls had taken place at the Court of France—those periods of idle inactivity which occasionally intervened between fierce struggles against the foreign enemy, or factious cabals amongst the courtiers themselves. He took his way from Poitiers towards Bourges, to fulfil the promise he had often made to himself of returning, at least for a time, to those he loved with unabated fondness; and, as he went, he thought with joy of his mother just as he had left her—not knowing that her hair was now as white as snow; and of his dear little Agnes—forgetting



that she was no longer a mere bright girl of fourteen years of age.

But Jean Charost now no longer appeared as a poor youth struggling to redeem his father's encumbered estates, nor as a soldier followed to battle by a mere handful of followers. His train was strong and numerous. The lands of St. Florent, so near his own castle and the town of Bourges, as to be under easy control of an intendant, had furnished not only ample revenues, but hardy soldiers; and, with a troop of some sixty mounted men, all joyful, like himself, to return for a period to their homes, he rode gladly onward, a powerful man in full maturity, with a scarred brow and sunburnt face, but with the rich brown curls of his hair hardly streaked with grey, except where the casque had somewhat pressed upon them, and brought the wintry mark before its time.

But it was in the expression of his countenance that youth was most strongly apparent still. There were no hard lines, no heavy wrinkles; there was gravity, for he had never

been of what is called a very merry disposition ; but it was—if I may be allowed an expression which at first sight seems to imply a contradiction—a cheerful gravity, more cheerful than it had been in years long past. Success had brightened him, experience of the world had rubbed off the rust that seclusion, and study, and hard application had engendered ; and a kind, a generous, and an upright heart gave sunshine to his look.

The country through which he travelled was all peaceful : the English troops had not yet passed the Loire : the Duke of Bedford was in England ; and his lieutenants showed themselves somewhat negligent during his absence. After the fiercest struggle, the spirit of the Frenchman soon recovers breath ; and, in riding from Poitiers to Bourges, one might have fancied that the land had never known strife and contention, and that all was prosperous and joyous, peace. There was the village dance upon the green : there was the gay inn, with its well fed host, and his quips and jests and merry tales :

the marriage-bells rang out : the procession of the clergy moved along the streets ; and song resounded in the vineyard and the field.

It was on an evening in the bright, warm summer, when the last day's march but one came towards an end, that, on a small height rising from the banks of the Cher, with a beautiful village at its foot, and woods sweeping round it on three sides, appeared the old Castle of St. Florent, where Jean Charost was to halt for the night, and journey on to de Brecy the following day. It was a pleasant feeling to his heart that he was coming once more upon his own land ; and there, above upon the great round tower, for it was a very ancient building even then, floated a flag, which bore, he doubted not, the arms of de Brecy. Just as he was passing one of the curious old bridges over the Cher, with its narrow, pointed arches, and massy, ivy-covered piers, a flash broke from the walls of the

tower; and, a moment after, the report of a cannon was heard.

"They see us coming, and are giving us welcome, de Bigny," said Jean Charost, turning to one of his companions who rode near. "Oh! 'tis pleasant to enjoy one's own in peace. Would to Heaven these wars were over! I am well weary of them."

They rode on towards the slope, and entered a sort of elbow of the wood, where the dark oak trees, somewhat browned by the summer sun, stretched their long branches overhead, and made a pleasant shade. It was a sweet, refreshing scene, where the eye could pierce far between the bolls of the old trees, catching here and there a mass of grey rock, a piece of rich greensward, a sparkling rivulet, dashing down to meet the Cher, a low hermitage with a stone cross raised in front, and two old men, with their long, snowy beards, retreating beneath the shady archway at the sight of a troop of armed men.

"This is pleasant," said de Brecey, still speaking to his companion; "but to-morrow will afford things still pleasanter: The face of Nature is very beautiful; but not so beautiful as the faces of those we love."

A hundred steps farther, and the gate of the old castle appeared in view, crenellated and machicolated with its two large flanking towers, and the walls running off, and losing themselves behind the trees. But there was the flutter of women's garments under the arch, as well as the gleam of arms. The heart of de Brecey beat high; and, dashing on before the rest, he was soon upon the drawbridge.

It is rarely that Fortune comes to meet her hopes. Hard school-mistress! She lessons man's impatience by delay. But there they were—his mother, and little Agnes, as he still called her. The change in both was merely that which time usually works in the old and in the young; and with old Madame de Brecey we will pass it over, for it had no consequences. But upon the changes in Agnes it may be

necessary to pause somewhat longer. From the elderly to the old woman, the transition is easy, and presents nothing remarkable: from the child to the young woman, the step is more rapid, more distinct and strange. There is something in us which makes us comprehend decay better than development.

Agnes, who, up to the period when Jean Charost last beheld her, had been low of stature, though beautifully formed, seemed to have grown up like a lily in a night, and was now taller than Madame de Brecy. But it was not only in height that she gained: her whole form had altered, and assumed a symmetry as delicate as, but very different from, that which it had displayed before. Previously she had looked what Jean Charost had been fond to call her—a little fairy; but now, though she might have a fairy's likeness still, there was no doubting that she was a woman. Beautiful, wonderfully beautiful, she was to the eyes of Jean Charost; yet there was something sorrowful in the change. The dear being of his

memory was gone for ever : and he had not yet had time to become reconciled to the change. He felt that he could not caress or fondle her as he had done before—that he could not be to her any longer what he had been ; and he dreamed not of ever becoming aught else.

Strange to say, Agnes seemed to feel the change far less than he did. Indeed, she saw no change in him. His cheek might be a little browner ; the scar upon his brow was new ; yet he was the same Jean Charost whom she had loved from infancy, and she perceived no trace of Time's hand upon his face or person. She had not yet learned to turn her eyes upon herself ; and the alteration in him was so slight, that she did not mark it. She sprang to meet him even before his mother, held up her cheek for his first kiss, and gazed at him with a look of affection and tenderness, while he pressed Madame de Brecy to his heart, which might have misled any beholder

who knew not the course of their foregone lives.

But Jean Charost was very happy. Between the two whom he loved best on all the earth, he entered the old *Chateau*, was led by them from room to room, which he had never seen ; heard how, as soon as they received news of his proposed return, they had come on from Brecy to meet him ; how the hands of Agnes herself had decked the hall, and how the tidy care of good Martin Grille had seen that everything was in due order for the reception of his lord. Joyfully the evening passed away, with a thousand little occurrences, all pleasant at the time, but upon which I must not dwell now. The supper was served in the great hall ; and, after it was over, and generous wine had given a welcome to de Brecy's chief followers, he himself retired with his mother and his fair young charge, to talk over the present and the past.

During that evening, the conversation was

rambling and desultory, a broken, ill-ordered chat, full of memories, and hardly to be detailed in a history like this. Jean Charost heard all the little incidents which had occurred in the neighbourhood of Bourges, how Agnes had become an accomplished horse-woman, how she had learned from a musician, expelled from Paris, to play upon the lute, how Madame de Brecey had ordered all things, both on their ancient estates, and those of St. Florent, with care and prudence, and how there were a thousand beautiful rides and walks around, which Agnes could show him on the banks of the Cher.

Then again he told them all he himself had gone through, dwelling but lightly upon his own exploits, and acknowledging with sincere humility that he had been rewarded for his services more largely than they deserved. Many an anecdote of the court, too, he told, which did not give either of his hearers much inclination to mingle with it; how the adhesion of the Count of Richmond had been

bought by the sword of Constable and other honors ; how the somewhat unstable alliance of the Duke of Brittany had been gained by the concession of one half of the revenues of Guyenne ; how Richmond had played the tyrant over his King, and forced him to receive ministers at his pleasure ; how he had caused Beaulieu to be assassinated, and how, after a mock trial, he had tied Giac in a sack, and thrown him into the Loire. Happily, he added, La Trimouille, whom he had compelled the King to receive as his minister, had avenged his monarch by ingratitude towards his patron ; how Richmond was kept in activity at a distance from the court, and all was quiet for the time, during his absence.

Thus passed more than one hour. The sun had gone down, yet no lights were needed ; for the large summer moon shone lustrously in at the window, harmonizing well with the feelings of those now met after a long parting. Madame de Brecey sat near the open casement ; Agnes and Jean Charost stood near, with her hand

resting quietly in his—I know not how it got there—and the fair valley of the Cher stretched out from below till all lines were lost in the misty moonlight of the distance.

Just then a solemn song rose up from the foot of the hill between them and St. Florent ; and Agnes, leaning her head familiarly on Jean Charost's shoulder, whispered—

“Hark ! The two hermits, and the children of the village whom they teach, are chaunting before they part.”

Jean Charost listened attentively till the song was ended, and then remarked, in a quiet tone—

“I saw two old men going into the Hermitage. I hope their reputation is fair ; for it is difficult to dispossess men who make a profession of sanctity, and yet their proximity is not always much to be coveted.”

“Oh yes, they are well spoken of,” replied Madame de Brecey. “But one of them, at least, is very strange, and frightened us.”

"It was but for a moment," cried Agnes, eagerly. "He is a kind, good man, too. I will tell you how it all happened, dear Jean ; and we will go down and see him to-morrow, for he and I are great friends now. The day after our arrival here, I had wandered out, as I do at Brecy, thinking myself quite as safe here as there, when suddenly in the wood, just by the little waterfall, I came upon a tall, old man, dressed in a gray gown, and walking with a staff. What it was he saw in me, I do not know ; but the instant he beheld me, he stopped suddenly, and seemed to reel, as if he were going to fall. I started forward to help him ; but he seized hold of my arm, and fixed his eyes so sternly in my face, that he frightened me. His words terrified me still more ; for he burst forth into the strangest, wildest language I ever heard, asking if I had come from the grave, and if his long years of penitence had been in vain, saying that he had forgiven *me*, and surely I might forgive

him; that God had forgiven him, he knew; and why should *I* be more obdurate. Then he wept bitterly. I tried to soothe and calm him; but he still held me by the arm, and I could not get away; and gradually he grew tranquil, and begged my pardon. He said he had been suffering under a delusion; asked my name, and made me sit down by him on the moss. There we remained and talked for more than half-an-hour; for, whenever I wished to go, he begged me piteously to stay. All the time I remained, his conversation seemed to me to ramble a great deal—at least, I could not understand one half of it. He told me, however, that he had once been a rich man, a courtier, and a soldier; and that, many years ago, he had been terribly wronged, and in a moment of passionate madness he had committed a great crime. He had wandered about, he said, for some years, as a condemned spirit, not only half insane, but knowing that he was so. After that, he met with a good man, who led him to better hopes, and thence-

forth he had passed his whole time in penitence and prayer. When he let me go, he besought me eagerly to come and see him in his hermitage ; and, taking Margiette, the maid, with me, I have been down twice. I have found him and his companion teaching the little children of the village ; and he has seemed glad to see me, though at first he gives a side-long glance, as if he almost feared me. But he seemed to know much of you, dear Jean ; at least, by name. He said you had always been faithful and true, and would be so to the end, and spoke of you as I love to hear. So you must come down with me, and see him and his comrade."

"I will," replied Jean Charost.

He made no farther remark on her little narrative. But what she told him gave him matter for much thought, even after the whole household had retired to rest.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Jean Charost awoke, it was one of those pleasant, drowsy summer mornings when all Nature seems still inclined to sleep, when there is a softness in the air, a misty haze in the atmosphere, streaky white clouds half veiling the sky, and when even the birds of the bush and beasts of the field seem inclined to prolong the sweet morning slumber in the midst of the bounteous dulcitude all around. A breath of air, it is true, stirred the trees ; but it was very gentle, and very soft ; and, though the lark rose up from his fallow to sing his early matins at Heaven's gate, yet the sounds were so softened by the distance, that one seemed to feel the melody, rather than to hear it. It was very early ; and from the window no moving object was to be seen, except the

mute herds winding on towards their pasturage, a rook wending its straight flight overhead, and an early labourer taking his way towards the fields. The general world was all asleep. Nevertheless, the young Lord de Brecey was soon equipped in walking guise, and wandering on towards the hermitage. He found its tenants up, and ready for the morning's labors; but one of them welcomed him as an old acquaintance, and, leading him into the cell, remained with him in conversation for more than an hour.

De Brecey came forth more grave than he had gone in, though that was grave enough; and, immediately on his return to the castle, messengers were despatched to Bourges to several public functionaries in that place. It was done quietly, however, and even those who bore the short letters of their lord had no idea that his impulse was a sudden one, supposing merely that he acted on orders received before he had set out from Poitiers.

Before he joined his mother and Agnes, too,

de Brecy passed some time in examining a packet of old papers, a few trinkets, and a ring; and then walked up and down thoughtfully in his room for several minutes. At length, casting away care, he mingled with his household again, and an hour went by in cheerful conversation. Perhaps Jean Charost was gayer than usual, less thoughtful; yet his mother observed that once or twice his eyes were fixed upon the face of Agnes for a very few moments with a look of intense earnestness and consideration. Nor was Agnes herself unconscious of it; and once, for a single instant, as she caught his look directed towards her, a fluttering blush spread over her cheek, and some slight agitation betrayed itself in her manner.

Shortly after, she left the hall, and Madame de Brecy said, in a quiet tone, but not without a definite purpose—

“I doubt not we shall have an early visit, my son, from a young neighbour of ours, who

lives between this place and de Brecy : Monsieur de Brives, whose *Chateau*, and the village of that name, you can see from the top of the tower. He has frequently been to see us, both here and at Brecy—I believe I might say, to see our dear Agnes. You see, my son, how beautiful she has grown ; and, to say the truth, I am very glad you have arrived before this gentleman has come to any explanation of his wishes ; for I could not venture to tell him of what even *I* know of Agnes's history, and yet he might desire to know something of her family."

She watched her son's countenance quietly while she spoke ; but she could not discover any trace of emotion thereon. Jean Charost was silent, indeed, and did not reply for two or three minutes ; but he remained quite calm, and merely thoughtful.

At length, he asked—

"Do you know, my dearest mother, anything of this gentleman's character?"

"It is very fair, I believe, as the world goes," replied Madame de Brecey. "He seems amiable and kind, and distinguished himself in the attack of Cone some years ago, I am told. He is wealthy, too, and altogether his own master."

"How does Agnes receive him?" asked Jean Charost, thoughtfully.

"Friendly and courteously," replied his mother; "but I have remarked nothing more. Indeed, I have given no great encouragement to his visits, thinking that perhaps the dear girl might meet with a sad disappointment if her affections became entangled, and her obscure history were to prove some unsurmountable obstacle in the eyes of the man she had chosen."

"Were it to do so, he would be unworthy of her," answered Jean Charost, rising, and walking slowly to and fro in the room. Then, stopping opposite to his mother, he added—"I have been thinking all this morning, my dear mother, of

telling Agnes everything I can tell of her history. It is a somewhat difficult and somewhat painful task. Yet it must be done."

"I think the sooner the better," replied Madame de Brecy. "I have long thought so; but, trusting entirely to your judgment, I did not like to interfere."

"Does she know that she is in no degree allied to us?" asked Jean Charost.

"Yes—yes," answered his mother. "Her own questions one day elicited that much. I could see she would fain have known more; but I merely told her she was an orphan committed to your care and guardianship. That seemed to satisfy her, and she has asked no more. But I think it is right that she should know all."

"She shall," returned Jean Charost. "I will tell her. But it must be at some moment when we are alone together."

"If you will give me any sign, I will quit the room," said Madame de Brecy.

"No," replied her son, thoughtfully. "No;

that will not be needful. I could not tell it in a formal way. It must be told gently, easily, my dear mother, in order not to alarm and agitate her. Some day, when we are riding or walking forth in the woods around, or on the castle walls, I will say something which will naturally lead her to enquire. Then, piece by piece, I will dole it out, as if it were a matter of not much moment. There sounds the horn at the gates. Perhaps, it is this Monsieur de Brives."

"What will you do if he speaks at once? asked Madame de Brecey; quickly adding, "I doubt not that he will do so."

"I will refer him to Agnes, herself," answered Jean Charost. "She must decide. First, however, I will let him know as much of her history as I may; and, as some counterpoise, will assure him that all which I have gained by my labours or my sword shall be hers."

"But you will some day marry, yourself, dear Jean—I hope, I trust so," said his mother, earnestly.

"Never!" ejaculated her son; and the next moment Monsieur de Brives was in the room.

He was a tall, handsome young man, of five or six-and-twenty, polished and courteous in his manners, with that tone of warm sincerity in his whole address, which is usually very winning upon woman's heart. Why, it is hardly possible to say; but Jean Charost received him with somewhat stately coldness; and the first few words of ceremony had hardly passed, when Agnes herself re-entered the room, and welcomed their visitor with friendly ease. De Brecy's eyes were fixed upon her eagerly.

At the end of a few minutes Monsieur, de Brives turned to Jean Charost, saying—

"I am glad you have come back at last, Monsieur de Brecy; for I have a few words to say to you in private, if your leisure serves to give me audience."

"Assuredly," replied de Brecy, rising.

Whispering a word to his mother as he passed, he led the way to a cabinet near, giving

one more glance at the face of Agnes. It was perfectly calm.

His conversation with Monsieur de Brives lasted half an hour; and, some time before it was over, Madame de Brecy quietly left the hall, while Agnes remained embroidering a coat of arms.

After awhile, the two gentlemen issued from the cabinet, and Monsieur de Brives took his way at once to the room where Agnes was seated. Jean Charost, for his part, went down to the lower hall, which had been left vacant, while his followers sported in the castle court. There, with a grave, stern air, and his arms crossed upon his chest, de Brecy paced up and down the pavement, pausing once to look out into the court upon the gay games going on. But he turned away without even a smile, bending his eyes thoughtfully upon the old stones, as if he would have counted their number, or spied out their flaws. The time seemed very long to him; and yet he would not interrupt the lover in his suit.

At length, however, he heard a rapid step coming, and, the next instant, Monsieur de Brives entered the hall, as if to pass through it towards the court. His face was deadly pale, and traces of strong emotion were in every line.

"Well," cried de Brecy, advancing to meet him. "She has accepted you—of course she has accepted you."

De Brives only grasped his hand, and shook his head.

"Did you tell her you knew all?" asked de Brecy. "Did you tell her of your generous—"

"In vain—all in vain," said the young man; and, wringing de Brecy's hand hard in his, he broke away from him and left the castle.

Jean Charost stood for an instant in the midst of the hall, buried in deep thought, and then mounted the stairs to the room where he had left Agnes. He found her weeping bitterly; and, going gently up to her, he seated himself beside her and took her hand.

"Dear Agnes," he said, "you are weeping—you regret what you have done—it is not yet too late. Let me send after him; he has hardly yet left the castle."

"No, no, no!" cried Agnes, eagerly. "I do not regret what I have said, though I regret having given him pain—I regret to give pain to anything. But I only told him the truth."

"What did you tell him?" asked Jean Charost, perhaps indiscreetly.

The face of Agnes glowed warmly; but she answered at once.

"I told him I could not love him as a woman should love her husband."

"Bitter truth enough from such lips as those," said Jean Charost, in a low tone.

"Indeed, indeed," cried Agnes, who seemed to feel some reproach in his words, "I did not intend to grieve him more than I could help in telling him the truth. But how could I love him?" she asked with a bewildered look; and


then, shaking her head sadly, she added, "No—no—no!"

"Not a word more, dear Agnes," said Jean Charost. "You did quite right to tell him the truth; and I am quite sure you did it as gently as might be. Now let us forget this painful incident as soon as we can, and all be as we were before."

"Oh, gladly," cried Agnes, with a bright smile. "I hope for nothing, I desire nothing but that."

He gradually soothed her with kindly tenderness, and wiled her away from all painful thoughts. Then, with more skill than might have been expected, he led the conversation by imperceptible degrees to other subjects, and to distant scenes.

The return of Madame de Brecey to the room renewed for a time the beautiful girl's agitation; and Jean Charost left her with his mother, after promising to take a long ramble with her that evening, and make her show him every fair spot in the woods around the castle.



Woman's heart, it is generally supposed, is more easily opened to a fellow woman than to a man; and sometimes it is so, but sometimes not. If we have watched closely, most of us must have seen the secrets within more carefully guarded from a woman's eyes than from any other—perhaps from a knowledge of their acuteness. Such, indeed, might not be—probably was not—the case with Agnes. Nevertheless, it was in vain that Madame de Brecy questioned her. She told all that had occurred frankly and simply, and related every word that had been uttered, as far as she could recollect them. But there was something that Agnes did not tell—the cause of all that had occurred. True, she could not tell it; for it was intangible to herself—misty, indefinite—a something which she could feel, but not explain.


Gladly she heard the trumpet sound to dinner; for she had set Madame de Brecy musing, and Agnes did not like that she should muse too long over her conduct of that day.

Noon proved very sultry, and Jean Charost had plenty of occupation for several hours after the meal. Horsemen came and went; he saw several persons from Bourges, and several of the tenants of St. Florent. He sent off a large body of the men who had accompanied him from Poitiers, to the neighbouring city; and the castle resumed an air of silence and loneliness.

Towards evening, however, he called upon Agnes to prepare for her walk; and, as he paced up and down the hall waiting for her, Madame de Brecy judged from his look and manner that he meditated speaking to his fair charge that very evening on the delicate subject of her own history.

“Be gentle with the dear girl, my son,” she said; “and if you see that a subject agitates her, change it. There is something on the mind of Agnes that we do not comprehend fully; and one may touch a tender point without knowing it.”

“Do you suspect any other attachment?”



asked Jean Charost, turning so suddenly, and speaking so gravely, that his mother was surprised.


"None whatever," she answered. "Indeed, I cannot believe such a thing possible. To my knowledge, she has seen no one at all likely to gain her affections, except this Monsieur de Brives. The stiff old soldiers left to guard this castle and BreCY, good Martin Grille, and Henriot, the groom, upon my word, are the only men we have seen."

The return of Agnes stopped further conversation, and she and de BreCY took their way out by one of the posterns on the hill. Agnes was now as gay as a lark; the shower had passed away and left all clear: not a trace of agitation lingered behind.

De BreCY was thoughtful, but strove to be cheerful likewise, paused and gazed wherever she told him the scene was beautiful, and talked with no ignorant or tasteless lips of the loveliness of Nature, and of the marvels of

art, which he had seen since he was last in Berri ; but there was something more in his conversation. There was a depth of feeling, a warmth of fancy, a richness of association, which made Agnes thoughtful also. He seemed to lead her mind which way he would : to have the complete mastery over it ; and exercising his power gently and tenderly, it was a pleasant and a new sensation to feel that he possessed it.

They came upon one very beautiful scene just when the sun was a couple of hands' breadth from the horizon. It was a small secluded nook in the wood, of ten or fifteen yards across, surrounded and overshadowed by the tall, old trees, but itself only covered with short green grass. It was as flat and even, too, as the pavement of the hall ; but, just beyond, to the south-west, was a short and sharp descent, from the foot of which some lesser trees shot up their branches, letting in between them, as through a window, a prospect of the



valley of the Char, and the glowing sky beyond.

"This is a place for Dryads, Agnes," said Jean Charost, making her sit down by him on a large fragment of stone which had rolled to the foot of an old oak. "Nymphs of the woods, dear girl, might well hold commune here with spirits of the air."

"I was thinking but the day before yesterday," observed Agnes, "what a beautiful spot this would be for a cottage in the wood, with that lovely sky before us, and the world below."

"It is always better," returned Jean Charost, with a smile, "to keep the world below us, or rather to keep ourselves above the world; but I fear me, Agnes, it is not the inhabitants of cottages who have the most skill in doing so. I have little faith either in cottages or hermitages."

"Do not destroy my dreams, dear Jean," said Agnes, almost sadly.

"Oh no," he answered, "I would not destroy, but only read, them."

Agnes paused, with her eyes bent down, for a moment or two, and then looked earnestly in his face.

"They are very simple," she said; "and easily read. The brightest dream of my whole life, the one I cherish the most fondly, is but to remain for ever with dear Madame de Brecey and you, without any change—except," she added, eagerly, "to have you always remain with us—to coax you to throw away swords and lances, and never make our hearts beat with the thought that you are in battle and in danger."

Jean Charost's own heart beat now, and he was silent for a moment or two.

"That cannot be, Agnes," he said. "And you would not wish it, my dear girl. Every one must sacrifice something for his country—very much in perilous times: men, their repose, their ease, often their happiness, their

life itself, should it be necessary : women, the society of those they love, brothers, fathers, husbands. Now, dear Agnes, I am neither of these to you, and therefore your sacrifice is not so much as that of many others."

"I know you are not my father," rejoined Agnes. "Our dear mother told me that long ago ; and do you know, Jean, I often wish you were my brother."

Jean Charost smiled, and seemed, for a moment, to hesitate what he should reply. He pursued his purpose steadily, however, and at length answered—

"That is a relationship which, wish as we may, we cannot bring about. But indeed we are none to each other, Agnes. You are only my adopted child."

"No, not your child," she said. "You are too young for that. Why not your adopted sister?"

"I never heard of such an adoption," replied de Brecy ; "but you are like a child to

me, Agnes. I have carried you more than a mile in my arms when you were an infant."

"And an orphan," she added, in a sad tone. "How much, how very much, do I owe you, kindest and best of friends!"

"Not perhaps so much as you imagine, Agnes," replied Jean Charost. "To save my own life in a moment of great danger, I made a solemn promise to protect, cherish, and educate you as if you were my own. I had incautiously suffered myself to fall into the hands of a party of ruthless marauders, who, imagining that I had come to espy their actions, and perhaps to betray them, threatened to put me to death. There was no possibility of escape or resistance; but a gentleman who was with them, and who, though not of them, possessed, apparently from old associations, great influence over them, induced them to spare me on the condition I have mentioned. You were then an infant, lying under the greenwood tree, and I, it is true, hardly more than a boy;

but I took a solemn promise, dear Agnes, and I have striven to perform it well. Yet I deserve no credit even for that, dear Agnes; for what I did at first from a sense of duty, I afterwards did from affection. Well did you win, and well did you repay, my love; and, as I told Monsieur de Brives this morning, although at my death the small estate of de Brecy must pass away to another and very distant branch of my family, all that I have won by my own exertions will be yours."

"Do you think I could enjoy it, and you dead?" asked Agnes, in a sad and almost reproachful tone. "Oh, no, no! All I should then want would be enough to find one place in a nunnery, there to pray that it might not be long till we met again. You have been all and everything to me through life, dear Jean. What matters it what happens when you are gone?"

Jean Charost laid his hand gently upon hers, and she might have felt that strong hand tremble; but her thoughts seemed busy with other

things. She knew not the emotions she excited. Doubtless she knew not even those which lay at the source of her own words and thoughts.

"It is sad," she continued, after a brief pause, "never to have seen a father's face, or known a mother's blessing—to have no brother, no sister; and, though the place of all has been supplied, and well supplied, by a friend, I sometimes long to know who were my parents, what was my family. I am sure you would tell me, if it were right for me to know, and therefore I have never asked—nor do I ask now, though the thought sometimes troubles me."

"I am ready to tell you all I know this moment," returned Jean Charost; "but that is not much, and it is a sad tale. Are you prepared to hear it, Agnes?"

"No—not if it is sad," she answered. "I have been looking forward to the time of your return, dear friend, as if every day that you may remain were to be a day of joy, and not a shadow to hang over me during the whole time. Yet

you have been but one day here, and that has been more chequered with sadness than many I have known for years. I have shed tears, which I have not done before since you went away. I would have no more sad things to-day. Some other time—some other time, you shall tell me all about myself.”

“All that I know,” added Jean Charost; “and I will give you, too, some papers which perhaps may tell you more. There are some jewels, also, which belong to you—”

“See,” said Agnes, interrupting him, as if her mind had been absent; “the sun is half way down behind the edge of the earth. Had we not better go back to the Castle? How gloriously he lights up the edges of the clouds, changing the dark grey into crimson and gold. I have often thought that love does the like; and when you and our dear mother are with me I feel that it is so; for things, that would be otherwise dark and sad, seem to become bright, and sparkle. Even that which made me weep

this morning has lost its heaviness, and, as it was to be, I am glad that it is over."

"Will you never repent, my Agnes?" asked Jean Charost, with a voice not altogether free from emotion. "Of this Monsieur de Brives, I know nothing but by report; yet he seemed to me one well calculated to win favour—and perhaps to deserve it."

"What is he to me?" asked Agnes, almost impatiently. "A mere stranger. Shall I ever repent?—Oh, never, never!"

"But you must marry some one nearly as much a stranger to you as he is," observed Jean Charost.

She only shook her head sadly, answering:

"Never!"

Jean Charost was silent for a moment; and, then rising, they returned to the Castle, with nothing said of all that might have been said.

CHAPTER IX.

THERE was a great change in Agnes, and Madame de Brecey remarked it immediately. Hers was an earnest, though a cheerful, spirit ; and, when she was thoughtful, those who knew her well might be sure that she was debating something with herself, examining some course of action, trying some thought or feeling before the tribunal of her own heart. All that night, and all the following morning, she was very thoughtful. Her gaiety seemed gone ; and though she could both listen and converse, yet at the least pause she fell back into a reverie.

Jean Charost, too, was a good deal changed, at least towards Agnes ; and the mother's eye remarked it with very varied feelings. His manner was more tender, his language more glowing ; a spirit was in his words which had

never been there before. He too was often very thoughtful ; but Jean Charost had other motives for thought besides those connected with Agnes.

Early on the morning of the day following the incidents lately detailed, he sent a man up to the watch-tower, with orders to keep his eye on the valley of the Cher ; and Madame de Brecey remarked that the soldiers who had remained at St. Florent were no longer scattered about, either amusing themselves in the village, or sporting in the courtyard, but were gathered together, all in busy occupation ; some cleaning and rubbing down their horses ; some polishing armour, or sharpening swords and lances ; some skilfully making arrows or quarrels * for the cross-bow. She refrained from asking any questions till after the mid-day meal ; but it was hardly over when the horn of the watcher upon the tower was winded loudly, and de Brecey, springing up from the table, ran up the stairs

* Arrows with square heads.

himself, as if on some notice of danger. Several of the chief persons of his little band were still around the board, but none of them moved, or showed any sign of anxiety, and, in truth, they had been so long inured to hourly peril that danger had lost its excitement for them.

The young lord was absent only a few minutes ; but on his return he did not resume his seat, merely saying to the soldiers around :

“To the saddle with all speed. Lead out all the horses. Some one bring me my armour. Do not look pale, my mother : I know not that there is any cause for alarm ; but I heard yesterday that troops were tending towards Bourges in a somewhat menacing attitude, and I think it may be as well for us to leave St. Florent for a time, and return to Brecey.”

“Are they the English ?” asked Madame de Brecey, evidently much frightened.

“Not so,” replied her son, “nor are they even the rebels on the English part ; but I grieve to say these are Royalists, perhaps more

dangerous to the King's cause than even his open enemies. I will tell you the circumstances presently; for there may yet be some mistake. The spears we have seen are very distant, and few in number. Our good friend above was quite right to give the alarm; but neither he nor I could at all tell what troops they were, nor in what force. I will go back and see more in a moment. In the meantime, however, dear mother, it would be well to have all prepared for immediate departure. I cannot receive these gentlemen as friends in St. Florent, and they may be very apt to treat those who do not so receive them as enemies. Dear Agnes, get ready in haste. Tell Martin Grille to have my mother's litter ready: I will return directly."

Thus saying, he again went up to the watch-tower, and remained gazing along the valley of the Cher for about a quarter of an hour. There was much woodland in those days along that fair valley; and Jean Charost could not satisfy himself. Spear-heads he certainly des-

cried ; but in the leafy covering of the scene they were lost almost as soon as perceived, and he could not tell their numbers.

At length he turned to the warder, who stood silent, gazing out beside him, and pointed to one particular spot in the landscape.

“ You see that large tree,” he said ; “ an evergreen oak, I think it seems. The road divides there into two : one turns eastward to the right ; the other comes towards the north. Watch those men well as they pass that spot. They must all show themselves there. If there be more than fifty, and they come on upon this road to the north, blow your horn twice and come down. If they take the other road, remain quiet where you are till I come.”

The preparations of Madame de Brecy under the effect of fear had been very rapid, and she and Agnes were standing in the hall, ready for departure. A page was there also, resting on a bench half covered with armour ; and, as soon

as his lord appeared, he sprang to arm him, asking, as Madame de Brecey had asked :

“ Are they the English ? ”

“ No, boy, no,” replied de Brecey. Then, turning to his mother, he added: “ There is no need of great haste. We shall hear more presently. The fact is, the Count of Richmond,” he continued, in a quiet, narrative tone, “ has ridden the Court somewhat too hard. He forced la Trimouille upon the King, as I told you the other night, and now he would rule la Trimouille, and through him his sovereign. He found himself mistaken, however ; for Trimouille is a very different person to deal with from Giac or Beaulieu. Finding himself opposed, he determined to employ force, joined with himself the Counts of la Marche and Clermont, and advanced upon Chatellerault. When I left Poitiers, the King had chosen a decided part, and ordered the gates of Chatellerault to be closed against the Counts. It was supposed, indeed, that the matter would soon be accom-

modated ; for Richmond is needful to the King, and is himself but a mere cypher, except when serving his Royal master. But, since my arrival here, I have heard that, instead of submitting dutifully, he has levied larger forces, and is marching upon Bourges. If the troops I have seen be his, we shall soon hear more, and then—though doubtless there would be no great danger in staying—it may be better to retire before them. How do you go, dear Agnes?—In the litter with my mother?”

“ Oh, no : I will ride,” replied the beautiful girl. “ I have become as good a cavalier as any man in your band.”

“ Well, then, you shall be my second page,” said Jean Charost, with a smile. “ Come and buckle this strap on my shoulder—the boy can hardly reach it.”

Agnes sprang forward, and buckled the strap ; and Jean Charost gaily kissed her cheek, saying—

“ Thanks for the service, dear Agnes.”

His tone and manner were altogether so easy and unconcerned, that even Madame de Brecy could hardly suppose that there was any cause for fear ; but a moment or two after, the horn was heard to sound twice from the tower above, and then the step of the soldier descending the stairs heavily.

“Now, dear mother,” said Jean Charost, taking the old lady’s hand, “you must let me lead you to your litter ; for these friends of ours are coming this way. Run, boy, and tell Martin Grille and the rest to mount and be gone on the road to Brecy. Come, Agnes, come.”

All were soon in the court-yard. It may seem an ungallant comparison, but all light things are more easily moved than weightier ones, and women, like dust, are soon disturbed by bustle. The very haste with which her son spoke, destroyed all Madame de Brecy’s confidence, agitated, alarmed her. Even Agnes felt a sort of thrill of apprehension come over her heart. But in those perilous times people

were drilled into promptitude. Madame de Brecy and two of the maids were soon in the litter, and Agnes mounted on her horse by Jean Charost's side. She had seen him in times of suffering and of captivity. She had seen him go forth to battle and to danger. She had seen him in the chivalrous sports, which in those times were practised in almost every castle in the land; but she had never ridden by his side in the hour of peril and command. On many a former occasion, deep interest, compassion, admiration perhaps, had been excited in her bosom; but now other sensations arose as she heard the clear, plain orders issue from his lips, and saw the promptness and submission with which all around obeyed. Surely woman was formed to yield; and, beyond all doubt, there is something very admirable to her eyes in the display of power. But she was to witness more before the day closed.

As they issued forth upon the road down to the village of St. Florent, nothing was to be

seen which could create the least alarm ; and, turning towards Solier, all seemed fair and open.

Still Jean Charost was evidently watchful and anxious, throwing out several men in front, and detaching others to the rear, while, as they approached the little valley which lies between the Cher and the Avon, and gives name to the small hamlet of La Vallée, he sent one of the soldiers, in whom he could trust, to the top of the church-tower to reconnoitre the country round. The man came back at speed, and rejoined the party ere they had proceeded far, bringing the intelligence that he had seen a considerable body of horse following slowly at about half a league's distance.

"Then we have plenty of time," said Jean Charost, in an easy tone. Nevertheless, he rather hurried the horses ; and, mounting the hill, the towers of Bourges were soon in sight.

At that time, the road to Mont Luçon entered the road to Bourges much nearer to the city than it does at present ; and it was

along the former that the path of Jean Charost lay in going to Breçy, if he wished to avoid passing through the city itself. But, as he approached the point of separation, the sound of a trumpet on the right met his ear; and, galloping up to a little eminence, he saw a large body of cross-bow-men, with thirty or forty men-at-arms, coming up from the side of Luçon. They were near enough for the banners to be visible; and he needed nothing more to decide him.

Wheeling his horse, he hurried down the hill again, and, speaking to his lieutenant, said—

“There are the men of la Marche in our way. There is nothing for it but to go through Bourges.”

“Here is Hubert come back from the front, sir,” returned the lieutenant, at once, “to tell us that they have got a party on the bridge over the Avon. They shouted to him to keep back; so they will never let us pass into Bourges.”

“The best reason for going forward,”

answered Jean Charost, in a gay tone. "We are nicely entangled; but we have made our way against more odds than this. How many are there, Hubert?"

"Much about our own number, sir," replied the man. "The others are a great deal farther off; but we are right between them."

"Oh, Jean! shall you be obliged to surrender?" asked Agnes, with a pale face.

"Surrender!" exclaimed Jean Charost, pointing to his pennon, which was carried by one of the men. "Shall de Brecy's pennon fall, my Agnes, before a handful of rebels, and you by my side? Give me my lance. Now, mark me, Durbois. The bridge is narrow: not more than two can pass abreast. You lead the right file; Courbeboix the left. Valentin, with the eight last men, must escort the litter and this lady. The object is to secure a free passage for my mother and her female companions. We must beat the rebels back off the bridge, and then disperse them over the flat ground beyond. Go back to the side of the litter, my Agnes. 'Twere better

you dismounted and joined my mother. Go back, dear girl ; we must lose no time. Now, Royal gentlemen, use the spur. *They* have bid us back—I say, forward !”

Agnes was alarmed, but less for herself than for him ; and, notwithstanding the wish he had expressed, she kept her seat upon her horse’s back, with her eyes straining upon the front, where she saw the plume of blue and white in de Brecy’s crest dancing in the air as his horse dashed forward.

On the little party went ; words were passed from front to rear ; quicker and quicker they moved forward, till a short turn of the road showed them the bridge over the Avon, partly occupied by a body of horse, several of whom, however, had dismounted, and seemed to be gazing nonchalantly up towards the walls of Bourges.

Jean Charost gave them no time to question or prepare ; for he knew them right well and why they were on that spot. Agnes saw

him turn for an instant in the saddle, shout loudly a word which she did not clearly hear, and the next moment his horse dashed forward to the bridge, at, what seemed to her, almost frantic speed. She saw him couch his lance, and bend over his saddle-bow ; but, the next instant, the greater part of his troop following, hid him from her sight. A momentary check was given to their headlong speed upon the bridge, and she could clearly see some one fall over into the water. All the rest was wild confusion ; a mass of struggling men, and horses rearing and plunging, and lances crossed, and waving swords and axes. Oh, how her young heart beat ! But, as she still gazed, not able to comprehend what she beheld, one of the soldiers suddenly took her horse by the rein, saying—

“Come on, dear lady, come on. Our lord has cleared the way. The bridge will be free in another minute. ’Tis seldom de Brecy gives back before any odds.”

Agnes could have kissed him ; but on they

went, and she soon saw that he was right. Driven on into the open space beyond the bridge, the men of the Count la Marche still maintained the combat; but they were evidently worsted; for some were beaten back to the right, some to the left, and some got entangled in the marshy ground, and seemed scarcely able to extricate their horses. To the great joy of Agnes, however, she saw the blue and white plume still waving on the right, and a clear space before them up to the walls of the city. Forward pressed the man who had hold of her rein: the litter came after as fast as the horses could bear it, followed by three or four servants in straggling disarray, but flanked on either side by two or three stout men-at-arms.

This was not all, however, which Agnes saw when she looked back to assure herself of the safety of Madame de Brecy. On the other side of the bridge, and across the marsh which lies to the east, she descried a large, dark body of spears moving on rapidly; and,

at the same time, as they came closer to the walls of the town, cries and shouts were heard, apparently from within.

"By the Lord, I believe they have won the city!" exclaimed the soldier, who was guiding her; and, almost at the same moment, a man from the battlement over the gate shouted something to her conductor, who replied—

"The Seigneur de Brecey. Just from Poitiers. Long live King Charles!"

"Ride quick to the castle gate," cried the man from above. "The Count of Richmond is in the city. They are fighting in the streets; but we are not enough to hold the town. To the castle—to the castle!" And he himself ran along the battlements to the westward.

Agnes' guide turned in the same direction; but was met by de Brecey coming at full speed a little in advance of his men, who now, gathered all together again in good order, were approaching the gate which Agnes and her companion had just left.

Jean Charost heard the tidings with evident

pain and anxiety ; but there was no time for deliberation ; and, with one cheering word to Agnes, he wheeled his horse, and galloped on to another gate hard by, close to which rose up the large round tower and smaller square keep of the old citadel of Bourges. Strong works, according to the system of fortification of that day, connected the castle with the gate below, and the space between the wall and the marsh was very narrow, so that the place was considered almost impregnable on that side. A number of persons were seen upon the towers as Agnes rode on ; and when she reached the castle drawbridge, she found de Brecy arguing with a small group of armed men upon the crenellated gallery of the gate-tower, who seemed little disposed to give him admission.

“Tell Monsieur de Royans,” he exclaimed, “that it is his old friend, de Brecy ; and in Heaven’s name make haste. They are rallying in our rear, and the other squadrons are coming on. You cannot suppose that I would

attack and rout my own friends. You have yourselves seen us at blows on the meadow. Wheel the men round there, Dupois, behind the litter," he continued, shouting to his lieutenant. "Bring their spears down, and drive those fellows into the marsh, if they come near enough."

As he spoke, however, the chains of the drawbridge began to creak and groan, a large mass of woodwork slowly descended, and the portcullis was raised.

"Forward, Agnes, forward !" cried de Brecey, riding towards the rear ; and, while he and a few of his followers kept the enemy in check, the rest of the party passed over the bridge, till they were all closely packed in the space between the portcullis and the gate. The latter was then opened ; and, riding on, Agnes found herself in a small sort of court, surrounded by high walls between the inner and the outer gates. There were stone staircases leading up to ramparts in different directions ; and down one of these flights a gentleman in

steel armour was coming slowly when the troop entered.

"Where is de Brecey?" he exclaimed, looking down upon the group below. "I do not see him. Varlet, you have not shut him out?"

"No, no: I am here," cried the voice of de Brecey, riding in from under the arch, while the portcullis clanged, and the drawbridge creaked up behind him.

"Pardi, de Brecey!" cried the man from above. "You have brought us a heap of women. Men are what we want. We have only provisions for a week, and we shall be closely pressed, I can tell you."

"Here are forty-seven horses," answered de Brecey, "which will feed the whole castle for a month, in case of need. But is there no means of passing through the town?"

"Impossible," cried the other. "They are just now fighting in the Castle Street to bring in safely the grain out of the corn-market."

Agnes, then, for the first time, became fully aware of her situation, and knew that, for awhile, she was destined to be the tenant of that small citadel, closely besieged, and but very ill provided to resist.

CHAPTER X.

THE power of the mind to accommodate itself to all things, is curiously displayed in the zest and carelessness with which soldiers, in the busy time of war, enjoy all short intervals of repose. The whole morning had been passed in skirmishing in the streets of Bourges, in strengthening every defence of the castle, and in collecting whatever provisions could be found in the neighbouring houses, so long as the smallness of the force in the town permitted parties to issue forth from the citadel. But, in the course of the day, the troops of the Count of la Marche, and of the Count of Clermont, entered Bourges, and joined the Count of Richmond. A strong party was posted across the river opposite to the gate of the castle ;

another occupied the bridge ; and the blockade of the citadel was complete.

Weary, however, with the long march and a morning's skirmishing, the troops of the revolted lords did not press the siege during the rest of the day. The defenders of the citadel, too, had but little opportunity of annoying the enemy, or serving themselves ; and, from three o'clock till nightfall, nothing occurred but an occasional shot of a cannon or a culverine, directed at any group of the enemy which might appear in the Castle street, or at the parties on the opposite side of the river. True, the citadel was surrounded on every side by a strong force—true, the siege was likely to commence on the following day, with vigor and determination ; still a sort of tacit truce was established for the time ; and, could any one have seen the little party of superior officers seated together in the castle of Bourges that night at supper, they would have seemed a gay assembly of thoughtless men met together on some occasion of merry-making. They laughed,

they talked, and some of them drank deeply ; but none of them seemed to give one thought to their perilous situation, trusting confidently to the precautions they had taken for defence, and to the care and faith of those who had been left upon guard.

Jean Charost, though perhaps the gravest of the party, seemed, for the time, as indifferent to the fate of the citadel as the rest. Seated next to Juvenel de Royans, he conversed upon any subject on earth but the state of Bourges, dwelling upon former times, and past-by occurrences, the days they had spent together in the household of the Duke of Orleans, their after meetings, and the fatal event of Monterreau.

“ What a strange thing life is, de Brecy ! ” exclaimed his companion. “ You and I meet first as enemies, and are ready to cut each other’s throats ; then as young friends and brothers-in-arms, ready to sacrifice our lives for one another ; and then here we are beleaguered in this fusty old *Chateau* of Bourges, with Rich-

mond, who never spares an enemy, and La Marche, who seldom spares a friend, ready to dig us out of our hole as they would unearth a badger on the side of a hill. I forgot to mention our short meeting at Monterreau; for, by my faith, I was too ill at that time even to do the honors of my quarters."

"You seem wonderfully improved in health, de Royans," said Jean Charost. "You look younger by four or five years than you did then."

"But a poor battered old soldier, after all," returned de Royans, tossing up with his finger one of the curls that hung at the back of his neck. "You see I am as grey as a wild goose. However, I am much better. A year's idleness on the banks of the Garonne, a little music, and a great deal of physic, cured my wounds, loosened my stiff joints, and enabled me to keep my horse's back almost as well as ever. I have got on in the world, too, de Brecy, have made some very nice little captures, paid off many old debts, and got *two*

companies of arquebusiers under my command instead of *one*. I wish to Heaven I had them all here. Had they been in the town, Richmond would never have got in by the north-west gate."

"I marvel much that he did, I will confess," replied Jean Charost. "Two days ago, I sent Monsieur de Blondel, intimation that Bourges was in danger. I thought it fit, indeed, to tell him the source from which I received the intelligence ; but still it might have kept him on his guard."

"Ah, I heard all about that," observed de Royans, laughing ; "and we were all more or less in fault. When Blondel got your letter, he held it in his hand, after reading it, and cried out, in his jeering way—'What's a hermit ? and what does a hermit know of war ?' Then said Gaucourt—'As much as the pig does of the bag-pipes, and why should he not ?' And then they all laughed, and the matter passed by. But who is this hermit who has

got such good intelligence? On my life, de Brecy, it would be well to have him in pay."

"That you could hardly do," replied de Brecy. "He was once a famous soldier, my friend, but has met with many disasters in life. I went to see him upon other matters; but the intelligence he gave me, transmitted from mouth to mouth all the way from Chatellerault to St. Florent, seemed so important, that I left him without even touching upon my object. He is looked upon as a saint by all the country round, and the peasantry tell him everything they hear."

"But what, in Fortune's name, took you to a saint?" asked Juvenel de Royans, laughing. "Was it to ask for absolution for wandering about the land with that lovely little creature you brought hither?"

Jean Charost looked grave; but answered, calmly—

"That was no sin, I trust, de Royans; for I may call her my adopted daughter. She had



indeed something to do with my going to see him; for he has great knowledge of her fate and history; and I wish to learn more than he has ever yet told me. It is time that she herself should know all. She will, it is true, have whatever I die possessed of; but still I could wish the mystery of her birth were cleared up."

"Why, surely this is not the infant you brought out of the wood, near Beauté sur Marne?" exclaimed de Royans. "The child we had so many jests upon?"

"The very same," replied Jean Charost. "She has been as a child to me ever since."

"We thought she *was* your child then," observed de Royans. "Heaven help us! I have learned to think differently since of many things, and would right gladly have wished you joy of your babe, if you had acknowledged her, right or wrong; but, as it was, we all vowed she was yours, and only called you the sanctified young sinner. Two or three times

I went down to good Dame Moulinet's to see if I could not get the truth out of *her* ; but, though she seemed to know much, she would say little."

"Do you know if she be still living, and where she is?" asked Jean Charost.

"She was living a year ago, and not ten miles from Bourges," answered de Royans ; "in the village of Solier, hard by the Cher. I had one of her sons in my troop. She and her husband are well to do now ; for they have got her father's inheritance. They were tenants of that old Monsieur de Solier, whose daughter our dear Lord and master, the Duke of Orleans, carried off by force from her husband."

Jean Charost started, and exclaimed—

"Merciful Heaven !"

"Ay, it was bad enough," said de Royans. "Our noble Lord had his little faults and his great ones, and some of them, I have a notion, embittered his last hours. This, above all



others, I believe, affected him ; for it had a terrible termination, as I dare say you remember."

"No—no," answered Jean Charost : "I never heard of it before. How did it end?"

"Why, the lady died," said de Royans, gravely. "No one of the household very well knew how—unless Lomelini did. Some say that she was poisoned—some that she was stabbed in her sleep."

"Not by the Duke?" exclaimed Jean Charost, with a look of horror.

"God forbid!" cried Juvenel de Royans, eagerly. "He only loved her too well. No. Strange tales were current ; but certain it is she died, and her death nearly deprived the Duke of reason, they thought. Now, I recollect, you first came about that very time. The lady had been ill some months ; but, as there was the cry of a baby in the house—one might hear it from the garden—we thought her illness natural enough. Her death, however, surprised

us all. Hypocritical Lomelini would have us believe that it was remorse that killed her ; but a great many strange things took place just then. One of the Judges of the Chatelet was brought to the palace—secret investigations took place ; and I know not what. Your coming about that time made us think you had something to do with the affair. Some said you were her younger brother. But what makes you look so sad, de Brecy ?”

“The subject is a sad one,” answered Jean Charost ; “and, moreover, new lights are breaking upon me, de Royans. Do you think, if Lomelini is still living, he could give me information upon those events ?”

“He could, if he would,” replied his companion. “He is living, and as sleek as ever, and Abbot of Briare ; but I can tell you, I think, all that remains to be told. Poor old Monsieur de Solier died of grief. I shall never forget his coming to the Palais d’Orleans to persuade the Duke to give his daughter up,

nor the despair of his countenance when the Duke would not see him. The husband made away with himself, I believe; which was a pity; for they say this Viscount de St. Florent was as good a soldier as any of his day, and had fought in many a battle under Charles V. However, he was never heard of more, from the time the Duke carried off his wife during his absence. That is all that is to tell. One—two—three, died miserably for a prince's pleasures, and he himself had his heart wrung with remorse, which is better, perhaps, than could be said of most princes. It is a sad history, though a brief one."

"And the child?" said de Brecy.

Juvenel de Royans looked suddenly up, with an inquiring glance.

"I do not know," he said. "But do you think—do you really believe—"

"I know nothing," replied Jean Charost. "The Duke told me nothing of all this. I had fancied he might have something of importance

to communicate; and, indeed something was said about giving me some papers; but he was murdered, and—”

“Did you never get the packet Lomelini had for you?” asked de Royans.

Before Jean Charost could answer, a soldier came into the hall, saying—

“Is there a Monsieur de Brecy here?”

“He is here, young man; what do you want?” asked de Brecy.

“I have a letter addressed to you, sir,” answered the soldier, advancing towards him.

All eyes turned at once upon the bearer of the letter, and him to whom it was addressed; and de Blondel, who was in command, exclaimed—

“A letter, by the Lord! Unless we have taken to writing letters to one another, the gates of the old *Chateau* must be more open than we thought.”

“I found it on an arrow-head, sir, just within the east barbican,” replied the soldier.

“Well, well; what contains it?” asked the

other, impatiently. "News or no news, good or bad, Seigneur de Brecey?"

"News, and good news," replied Jean Charost, who had by this time received the letter and unfolded it. "Hear what he says." And he proceeded to read, from the somewhat crooked and irregular lines before him, the following words :—

"FAITHFUL AND TRUE,

"This is to have you know that King Charles is already on the march for your deliverance. Hold out to the last, and two days will see the Royal banner before Bourges. Let not your companions slight this notice as they slighted the last; for the shameful loss of Bourges can only be repaired by the brave defence of the castle."

"He touched us there pretty sharply," said Blondel; "and, 'pon my life, what he says is true; so I for one swear, by this flagon of wine, and if I don't keep my vow may I never drink

another, that I will bury myself under the ruins of the castle before I surrender it. What say you, gentlemen? Will you all touch the tankard, and take the vow?"

They all swore accordingly; for the chivalrous custom of making such rash vows had not departed, though Chandos, one of the most remarkable of vow-makers, had laid his head in the grave nearly half a century before.

It must be confessed, however, that Jean Charost took the oath unwillingly; for there were lives in that castle dearer to him than his own.

CHAPTER XI.

THIS is not a book of battles and sieges—those fireworks of history which explode with a brief space of brilliant light, and leave nothing but dust, and tinder, and darkness. The man who gave an account of the three great battles of the world, and explained that he meant those which had permanently affected the destinies of the human race, probably named three too many. There is nothing so insignificant as a battle. The invention of the steam-engine was worth a thousand of the greatest victories that ever were achieved.

This is no book of battles and sieges ; and therefore I will pass lightly over the events of the two succeeding days. Suffice it, the Counts of Richmond, Clermont, and Marche, pressed the Castle of Bourges with all the means and

appliances they could command. They attacked it from the country side: they attacked it from the city: they assailed the gates and barriers sword in hand: they endeavoured to escalate the walls; but they were met at every point with stern and determined resistance, and, though by no means well-prepared for defence, the Chateau held out: the besiegers lost many men, and gained nothing.

In the midst of these scenes Jean Charost was not inactive. Now on the walls, now at the barricades, and now quietly sitting in the high upper chamber of the round-tower, with Agnes and his mother and their maids plying the busy silk with trembling fingers, he tried to give encouragement to the soldiery, and to restore confidence and calmness to the women. There was something in his aspect, something in the perfect serenity of his look and manner, in the absence of every sign of agitation and anxiety on his face, which was not without its effect; and the news which he brought of the speedy coming of the King of France to the

relief of his faithful vassals besieged in Bourges, afforded bright hope and expectation. The services of himself, and those whom he brought with him, were great to the defenders of a citadel too large for the numbers it contained; and his quiet, unassuming bravery, his activity and ready presence of mind, won for him that respect which pretension, even well-founded, could not have gained.

"I always knew he would make a good soldier," said Juvenel de Royans, somewhat proud of his friendship, and their long companionship; and Blondel himself, one of the first knights of France, admitted that he had never seen a clearer head or stronger hand exercised in the hour of danger.

At first sight, it may seem strange to say that the news of the King's march, which brought hope and relief to the garrison—and in one sense to Jean Charost also—filled him, when considered in another point of view, with grief and alarm. But when he considered what

must necessarily be the consequence, at a moment when more than one half of France was in possession of a foreign invader, and the first vassal of the Crown in arms against his sovereign, of an actual struggle between the Monarch in person, and three of those who had been his chief supporters, his heart sank as he thought what might be the fate of France.

During many a moment throughout the first and second day, when a pause took place in the attack, he meditated somewhat sadly of these things; but he was not a man to meditate without action; and, towards evening, he took de Blondel aside to confer with him as to what was to be done. A few words presented the subject to the mind of the other in the same light in which it appeared to himself; and he then said :

“ I wish you very much to consider this, Monsieur de Blondel, as I think an opportunity is afforded you of rendering great service to France. Were I in your place, I would open negotiations at once with the Constable, and

represent to him the consequences that are likely to ensue. It would be no slight honour to you if you could induce him to cease the attack, and draw off his forces, even before the King appears ; and little less if you could commence a negotiation which might be carried on after His Majesty's arrival, and heal these unhappy dissensions."

" By the Lord !" cried Blondel, " if I were the King, I would have the head of every one of those who by their insolent ambition and rebellious spirit give strength to the arm of our foreign adversary, and take away the strength of France ! Nevertheless, I suppose he is obliged to temporize. But many difficulties are in the way, my good friend. You are a negotiator, I am told, as well as a soldier. I know nothing of such things, and should only make a blunder. I should never know how to use the knowledge we possess of the King's coming, without betraying the secret to the enemy."

" Well, leave it to me," said de Brecy. " I will act in your name."

De Blondel mused for a minute.

"On the condition," he said, at length, "that there is no talk of surrendering the Castle; and also that you say nothing of the King's movements till he is actually in sight. On my life, the task is perilous; for Richmond is just the man to hang any one who pretends to oppose his will, or else drown him in a sack, as he did Giac."

"I will go nevertheless," replied de Brecy. "I have no fear. The Constable is violent, haughty, domineering; but at heart he has a sincere love for France, a bitter hatred of the English, and devotion to the Royal cause. Giac he scorned, as well as hated; and, besides, Giac stood in his way. Me, he neither scorns nor hates, nor wishes to remove. By your leave, I will send out for a safe conduct by a flag of truce, and you shall give me a general authority to treat, though of course not to conclude."

De Blondel was easily led in such matters. A good soldier and a gallant man, he com-

manded skilfully, and fought well; but his political views were not very far-sighted, and he was one of those persons who fancy they save themselves half the trouble of decision by looking only at one side of a question.

The authority was given as amply as Jean Charost desired, and nearly in words of his own dictation. A flag of truce was sent out to demand a pass for the Seigneur de Brecy, in order to a conference with the Lord Constable; and he speedily returned with the paper required, reporting that he had remarked much satisfaction amongst the rebel leaders at the message which he had borne them, in which they doubtless saw an indication of some intention to capitulate.

A slight degree of agitation was apparent upon Blondel's face as Jean Charost, divested of his harness, and armed only with sword and dagger, prepared to set out upon his enterprise.

"I do not half like to let you go, Sir Knight," he said. "This Richmond is a very furious

fellow. There is no knowing what he may do."

"I do not fear," repeated Jean Charost. "But, in case of any accident, de Blondel, I trust in your honour and your kindness to protect the ladies whom I leave here with you. They have thirty or forty men with them, who would each shed the last drop of his blood in their defence; but the honour of a Knight, and that Knight, de Blondel, is a surer safeguard than a thousand swords."

The gates of the Castle were soon passed, and the first barricade, which the assailants had raised in the *Rue du Chateau*, was reached without question. About half a dozen men were lying on a pile of straw behind, lighted by a solitary lantern; but two of them started up immediately; and, though neither of them could read a word of the pass, they both seemed to have been previously informed of what they had to do; for they insisted upon bandaging de Brecy's eyes, and leading him on blindfold, as if conducting him through the

works of a regular fortress. He submitted with a smile ; for he knew every step of the city of Bourges from his childhood, and could almost tell each house that they passed as he was led along. The tread of the broad, stone sill of the gate-way, where they at length stopped, was quite familiar to him ; and it was without surprise, that, on the bandage being removed, he found himself in the court-yard of his old friend Jacques Cœur.

Conducted up a narrow staircase, in one of the congregation of square towers, of which the building principally consisted, he was introduced into a diminutive but very lofty cabinet, lined with gilt leather hangings. In the midst stood a small table, with three gentlemen surrounding it, and a lamp swinging overhead, and showing a mass of papers on the board—the stern, square-cut head of the Constable which was bent over them—the mild and rather feeble expression of the Count la Marche, and the sharp, supercilious face of the Count of Clermont.

"Here is Monsieur de Brecy, I presume," said the latter, addressing Richmond.

The Constable started up, and held out his hand frankly, saying—

"Welcome, welcome, de Brecy ! Sit down. There's a stool. Well," he continued, as soon as the guard was gone, and the door closed, "what cheer in the Castle ?"

"Very good cheer, my Lord," replied de Brecy. "We have not yet finished the pullets, and horse-flesh is afar off."

The Count la Marche laughed ; but Richmond exclaimed, somewhat impatiently—

"Come, let us to the point. You are frank and free usually, de Brecy. Say what terms of capitulation you demand, and you shall speedily have my answer."

"You mistake my object altogether, my Lord," replied de Brecy. "The Castle is less likely to capitulate than when first you sat down before it. There are now men enough within to defend it for a month against five times your force, unless you shoot better than

you have done these last two days; and we have provisions for some months, as well for our own mouths as for those of the culverines."

"Then, in the devil's name what did you come here for?" exclaimed Richmond, angrily.

"Upon business, my Lord," replied de Brecy, "that I should wish to communicate to you alone."

"No, no. No secrets from these gentlemen," said the Constable; and then added, with a hard, dry laugh, "We are all chickens of one coop, and share the same grain and the same fate. Speak what you have to say before them."

"Be it so, if you desire it, my Lord," replied de Brecy. "I came to offer a humble remonstrance to you, sir, and to point out a few facts regarding your own situation—" Richmond gave an impatient jerk in his chair, as if about to interrupt him; but de Brecy proceeded—"and that of the citadel; facts which I think have escaped your attention."

"Ay, ay! Speak of the citadel," answered Richmond. "That is what I would fain hear of."

"I have told you, my Lord," continued de Brecy, "that the citadel can and will hold out for more than a month, and nothing that you can do will take it. Long before that month is at an end, the King himself will be here to give it relief."

"Well, let him come," exclaimed Richmond, impatiently. "We may have the citadel before he arrives, for all you say."

"I think not, sir," answered de Brecy; "and if you knew as much of the affair as I do, you would say so too. But let us suppose for a moment that the Castle does hold out, and that the King arrives before you can take it—"

"Perhaps we can deal with both," interrupted Richmond.

"And ruin France," answered de Brecy. "I will never believe that the Count of Richmond—the loyal, faithful Count of Richmond—

that the Count of la Marche, allied to the Royal race, or the Count of Clermont, well-known for his attachment to the throne, would be seen fighting against their Sovereign at the very moment when, surrounded by foreign enemies, he is making a last desperate struggle for the salvation of his country and your own."

He turned slightly towards the Count la Marche as he spoke; and Richmond exclaimed, in a furious tone—

"Speak to me, sir. I am commander here. By the Lord, if you attempt to corrupt my allies, I will have your head off your shoulders."

"You forced me to speak in their presence, my Lord," replied Jean Charost, coolly, "and whatever I have to say must be said as boldly as if they were not here."

"Nay, nay; let him speak, good cousin," said the Count la Marche. "It is but right we should hear what he has to say."

"My noble Lord Constable," said Clermont,

"cannot blame Monsieur de Brecy for acting on his own orders. We were his dear allies a moment ago, and partner of all his secrets. Why should we not hear the gentleman's eloquence?"

"Would I ~~were~~ eloquent!" ejaculated de Brecy.

"I would then show you, my Lords, what a spectacle it would hold up to the world to see one of the first officers of the crown of France, and two of the first noblemen of the land, from some small personal disgusts at the King's prime minister, violating their religion, frustrating all their Sovereign's efforts to save his country, plunging, by military factions, the state, already made a prey to enemies, into greater danger and confusion than ever, and destroying the last hope for safety in France."

Richmond rolled his eyes from the speaker to the two Counts, and from their faces to that of de Brecy again, while his fingers were clasped ominously round the hilt of his dagger.

"Let him do us justice," he cried. "Let

him do us justice, and we will sheath the sword."

"Even if he have not done you justice," said de Brecey, boldly, "is this a moment to unsheath the sword against your King—that sword which he himself put into your hands? Is this a time, when every true son of France should sacrifice all personal considerations, and shed the last drop of his blood, were it necessary, for the deliverance of his country, to take advantage of the difficulties of his Sovereign to wring concessions from him by force of arms? But has he not done you justice, my Lord Constable? Twice has his minister been sacrificed to your animosity. A third time you quarrel with the minister whom you yourself forced upon him, and plunge your unhappy country, already torn to pieces by strangers, into civil war, because the King, for the third time, will not submit to your will. Are his ministers but nine-pins to be set up and knocked down for your pleasure? Are they but tools to be

used as you would have them ; and are you an officer of the King, or his ruler ?”

The Constable started up, with his drawn dagger in his hand, and would probably have cast himself on de Brecy, had not the Count la Marche interposed.

“ Hold, hold !” he cried, throwing himself in the way. “ No violence, Richmond. On my life, he speaks well, and truly. We are here for the public good.”

“ At least, we pretend so,” interposed the Count of Clermont. “ Really, my Lord Constable, you had better let Monsieur de Brecy go on, and speak quietly. We presume that he can say nothing that you would not wish us to hear, being chickens of the same coop, as you yourself have said ; and the sharp arguments you seemed about to use might convince *him*, but could not convince *us*.”

Richmond threw himself into his seat again, and thrust the dagger back into its sheath.

“ Let us consider calmly,” said the Count

la Marche, "what are to be the consequences if the King does come to the relief of this castle before we have taken it."

"Simply that we shall be besieged in the good city of Bourges," said the Count of Clermont, "and pass three or four months very pleasantly, with such diet and exercise as a besieged city usually affords."

"Merely to get rid of la Trimouille," added the Count la Marche.

The door suddenly opened as he spoke, and a gentleman armed, all but the head, entered in haste.

"I beg your pardon, my Lords," he said; "but I have thought fit to bring you instant intelligence that trumpets have been heard in the direction of Pressavois, and some of the peasantry report that the King is there with a large force."

"So soon!" ejaculated Richmond.

"Got between us and Paris!" said the Count of Clermont.

"The very movement is a reproach, my

Lords," observed de Brecey. "It shows that the King unhappily has been led to infer, from the surprise of Bourges, that three of the noblest men in France are in league with the common adversary. Oh, wipe away such a stain from your names, I beseech you! Send somebody to the King to make representations, if nothing more; and let not the Englishmen see true Frenchmen shedding each other's blood, while they are riding triumphant over the land. My life for it, if you have any real grievances, they will be redressed when properly represented."

"It is false!" cried Richmond, vehemently, catching at some of de Brecey's words, and not heeding the rest. "We have no league with the enemy. We are faithful vassals of the Crown of France; but we can be loyal to the King without being servile to his minister."

"I doubt you not in the least, my Lord," replied de Brecey. "Had I believed you disloyal, I never would have come hither. I have sought but to show you what language your

actions speak, without ever questioning the truth and fidelity that is in your heart. All I beseech you now to do, is to send some one forthwith to the King to negotiate terms of accommodation, and to show the loyalty you feel before passion lead you into absolute treason."

"I think the proposal is a very good one," said the Count la Marche. "We can do no harm by negotiating."

"At all events, it will put our adversaries in the wrong," said Clermont. "What say you, Richmond?"

"Well, well," said the Constable, "I say yea, also, although I have known more great successes cut short, more mighty enterprizes frustrated, more good hopes crushed, by small negotiation than by battle or defeat. However, so be it. Let some one go; though, good faith, I know not who will be the man, being sure of one thing, that, were I Tremouille, and a sleek-faced negotiator were to come with pleasant

words from Richmond, la Marche, or Clermont, I would write my answer on his forehead, and hang him on the first tree I found. When men have gone as far as we have, to my mind, there is no going back. However, I yield to better judgment. Send some one, if you can find any body."

Clermont and la Marche consulted together for a moment or two in a low tone, and, to say sooth, they seemed sorely puzzled. But, at length, la Marche looked up, saying, with some hesitation—

"Perhaps, Monsieur de Brecy would undertake the task?"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the Constable, slightly raising his hands and eyes.

"I will go willingly," replied de Brecy; "but it can only be, my Lords, to open the negotiation for you. Carry it on, I cannot, as I am not of your faction. I shall require a letter under the hand of one or more of you, assuring his Majesty of the loyalty of your in-

tentions, and begging him to appoint persons to confer with yourselves or your deputies in regard to certain grievances of which you complain. In this I think I shall succeed; but I will bear you back his Majesty's answer, and after that can take no farther share in the business."

"What, then!" exclaimed the Constable, in a tone of affected surprise. "You do not propose to rise upon our tombs to higher honor and preferment?"

"Not in the least," replied de Brecy. "I am here, even at this present moment, merely as the envoy of Monsieur de Blondel, who sent me to you, as this authority will show."

"Pooh, pooh!" ejaculated Richmond, in a contemptuous tone. "De Blondel has no wits either for the conception or the execution of such projects. But one thing I must exact, Monsieur de Brecy. If we send you to the King, you must hold no consultations in the Castle before you go."

De Brecy meditated, for a moment, and then replied—

“See Monsieur de Blondel I must, my Lord; for I came from him to you, and must render him an account of what I have done. That account, however, may be very short. I can have him called to the barriers, and any one of you may hear what passes. I must, however, have horses, and some of my train.”

“Be it so,” said the Constable. “I will go with you. You, Clermont, are a scribe; so write the letter to the King. It will be ready when we come back. Doubtless, you will make it dutiful enough, and you need not say, unless you wish it, that Richmond is the only obstacle.”

With this sneer he rose, put his bonnet on his head, and accompanied de Brecy out of the room. As they went, he said little; and, at the barrier, both while Jean Charost waited for Blondel's coming, and during their short conference, stood silent, with his arms crossed

upon his breast. The Governor of the Castle, indeed, noticed the Constable first, saying—

“Give you good night, my Lord.”

But Richmond only bent his head gravely in reply, and spoke but once during the whole interview, saying, when Jean Charost had given directions regarding his horses and men—

“Send them down to Jacques Cœur’s house, de Blondel, and that as quick as may be, for fear la Marche should have time to change his mind, and Clermont to fill his letter so full of tropes that no one can understand it.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE town and the Castle were quiet ; the hateful sound of the rattling cannon was heard no more ; *pierrier, veuglaire*,* and culverine were still, and the drum and the trumpet sounded not.

When Agnes looked out of the high window of the great round-tower, after a sleep which had remained unbroken by the clang of war longer than usual, she could almost have supposed that everything around was peaceful.

* A large piece of artillery which threw immense balls of stone, evidently by the force of gunpowder. It was by the discharge of one of these that the famous Earl of Salisbury was killed under the walls of Orleans in the following year.

The morning sun shone brightly, the morning air was sweet and fresh ; few soldiers appeared upon the walls of the Castle ; no strife was seen in the streets ; and it was only the sight of a barricade immediately below the town-gate of the citadel, and a breastwork of earth some way farther down, with half-a-dozen soldiers loitering about each, that kept up the memory of a struggle.

Although she knew not the cause, Agnes was well pleased ; for the very stillness was a relief, restoring to the mind calmness and hope. But Agnes' hopes had now taken one particular direction ; and her first thought was—

“As there is no active struggle going on, dear Jean will be with us soon this morning.”

But Jean Charost came not. An hour passed—an hour beyond the usual time of his coming—and both his mother and Agnes began to feel some alarm. At length they sent down to inquire ; but the answer brought up was, that he had gone out on the preceding night, and had not yet returned.

Had the wars and contentions which had raged through the rest of France, prevailed in the neighbourhood of Bourges—had Madame de Brecy and Agnes been accustomed to the scenes of strife and confusion which reigned in the rest of the country—had they been drilled, as it were, and disciplined to hourly uncertainty, they might have felt little or no alarm. But Berri had been nearly free from the evils that scourged the rest of France; and a wandering troop of Royalist cavalry, or the sudden inroad of a small band of English or Burgundians, causing them to raise the drawbridge and drop the portcullis, was all they knew of the dangers of the times. Even during the short period they had spent in the citadel of Bourges, however, Jean Charost had always found means to spend a short part of each day with them; and, although his not coming at the usual hour might not have caused much apprehension, the reply that he had gone forth from the Castle and not returned, agitated them both.

The alarm of Agnes, however, was much more than that of Madame de Brecy. From many causes, the aged feel this kind of apprehension much less than the young. Cares and griefs harden the spirit to endure. Each sorrow has its stiffening influence. Besides, as we approach the extreme term of life, we are led to value it less highly—to estimate it properly. When we contemplate it from the flowery beginning of our days, oh, what a rich treasury of golden hours it seems! and we think every one like us has the same dower. But when we look back at it, when our portion is nearly spent, we see how little really serviceable to happiness it has procured, and we judge of others as of ourselves. A friend dies, and, though we may grieve, we think that we may soon meet again. A friend is in danger; and we feel the less alarm from a knowledge that, in losing life, he loses little—that a few years, more or less, are hardly dust in the balance, and that, if he be taken away, it is but that he

goes from an inn somewhat near us, to his home farther off.

Agnes was very anxious. Hers was a quick imagination, active either in the service of joy or sorrow; and she fancied all that might have occurred, and much that was not likely. At one time she was inclined to believe that the commander of the castle was deceiving Madame de Brecy and herself, anxious to save them pain—that Jean Charost had been killed, and that de Blondel would not tell them. She little knew how lightly a hardened soldier could deal with such a matter. Then, reasoning against her fears, she thought that de Brecy must have gone forth upon a sally, and been made prisoner; and memory brought back all the sorrows that had followed Azincourt.

But worst of all was the uncertainty—the toilsome labouring of thought after some definite conclusion—the ever-changing battle between hope and fear, in which fear was generally triumphant. She sat at the high window,

gazing over the surrounding country, and watching the different roads within sight. Now, she saw a group coming along towards the gate; but, after eager scanning, it proved nothing but some peasants bringing in provisions for the soldiery. Then, an indistinct mass was seen at a distance; but, long ere it reached Bourges, it turned away in a different direction. Each moment increased her anxiety and alarm. Hours went by. Again she saw some one coming, and again was disappointed; and the long-repressed tears rose in her eyes, the sobs, with which she could struggle no longer, burst from her lips.

"Agnes, Agnes, my child, come hither," cried Madame de Brecy.

Rising from her seat, Agnes cast herself upon her knees beside Jean Charost's mother, and hid her streaming eyes upon her lap.

"What is it, my dear Agnes?" inquired Madame de Brecy, much moved. "Tell me, my child; what agitates you thus? Tell me your feelings—all your feelings, my Agnes.

Surely I have been to you ever as a mother. Conceal nothing from me."

"Why does he not come?" asked Agnes, in a voice hardly audible. "Oh, dear mother, I fear he is ill—he is hurt—perhaps he is—"

"Nay, nay," interposed Madame de Brecey. "You have no cause for such agitation, Agnes. A soldier cannot command his own time, nor can he, amidst many important tasks, always find the opportunity of letting even those he loves best know his movements, even to relieve their anxiety. A soldier's wife, my child," she added, putting her arm gently round the kneeling girl, "must learn to bear such things with patience and hope—nay, more, must learn to conceal even the anxiety she must feel, in order to cast no damp upon her husband's spirits, to shackle none of his energies, and to add nothing to his sorrow of parting even with herself. Would you not like to be a soldier's wife, my Agnes?"

"I know not what I should like," answered Agnes, without raising her head. But then

she added quickly, as if her heart reproached her for some little insincerity—"Yes, yes; I should; but then I should like him to be a soldier no longer."

A faint smile came upon Madame de Brecey's lip, and she was devising another question to bring forth some farther confession, when, through the open window, came the sound of a trumpet, and Agnes starting up darted back to her place of watching.

Oh, how eagerly she dashed away the tears that dimmed her eyes; and the next instant she exclaimed, with a radiant, rosy look of joy, which rendered all farther confession needless,

"It is he! It is he! There are a great number with him—twenty or thirty—but I can see him quite plainly—It is he!"

Hardly five minutes elapsed, and Agnes had barely time to clear her face of the traces of emotion it displayed, when Jean Charost's step sounded on the stairs, and the next moment he was in the room.

Very strange, Agnes did not fly to meet him.

Agnes uttered no word of gratulation. But she stood and trembled ; for sometimes realities are discovered within the heart, as full of awe as any which can strike our outward senses ; and, by the withdrawal of a veil, truths had become apparent to her, which, when first contemplated, were fearful as well as dazzling.

“Joy, dear mother—joy, dearest Agnes !” exclaimed de Brecy, holding forth a hand to each. “Your prison hours are over. A truce is proclaimed, negotiations for reconciliation are going on, and you have nothing to do but mount and ride away with me. Quick with your preparations, dearest mother ! Quick, my sweet Agnes !”

“Do not hurry her, my son,” said Madame de Brecy, kindly ; “she has been very much terrified by your long absence, and has hardly yet recovered. She shall go in the litter with me, and I will tell Suzette to get all ready for her.”

“Terrified for me, dearest Agnes !” ejaculated Jean Charost, as his mother left the

room; and he took her hand in his, and gazed into her face. "Did they not give you the message I sent last night?"

"No," answered Agnes, in a low tone. "They only told us this morning, when we sent to enquire, that you had gone forth, and had not returned. How could they be so cruel? One word from you would have saved us hours of pain."

"You are trembling now," said Jean Charost, still holding her hand. "What would you do, dear Agnes, if you were a soldier's wife?"

"Your mother asked me the same," answered Agnes, with a faint smile, "and I told her I did not know. I can but make you the same answer, Jean. I suppose all a woman can do is to love and tremble."

"And could you love a soldier?" asked de Brecey, in a very earnest tone.

"Oh, that I could," murmured Agnes, trembling more than ever.

Jean Charost led her towards a seat, and, as she trembled still, and he feared

she would fall, he put his arm around her waist, merely to support her. It had been there a thousand times before, in years long past, when she had stood by his side or sat upon his knee ; but the touch now was different to both of them. It made his heart thrill and beat. It made her's nearly stop altogether.

She was so pale, he thought she would faint ; and instinct prompted that the safest way was that of the Proverb : to speak true words in jest. So, in a gay tone, he said, as he seated himself beside her, still holding his arm round her waist,

“ Well, I'll tell you, dearest Agnes, how it shall be. When you have refused some half-a-dozen other soldiers, you shall marry Jean Charost, and I will give you leave to love as much as you like, and to tremble as little as possible.”

Agnes suddenly raised her eyes to his face, with a look of earnest enquiry, and then her cheek became covered with crimson, and she leaned her head upon his bosom.

She said nothing, however, and he asked, in a low and gentle tone—

“Shall it be so, dearest Agnes?”

“No,” she answered, wiping away some tears. “I do not wish to refuse any one else.”

“Ah, then I must make haste,” said Jean Charost, “for fear you should accept any one else. Will you be my wife, my own sweetest love?”

Again she answered not; but her small soft fingers pressed gently on his hand.

“Nay, but I must have a word,” said Jean Charost, drawing her closer to him; “but one word, dear girl. That little hand cannot speak so clearly as those dear lips.”

“Oh, do not tease me,” said Agnes, raising her head for a moment, and taking a glance at his face. “I hardly know whether you are bantering me or not.”

“Bantering you!” said Jean Charost, in a graver tone. “No, no, my love. I am not one to banter with your happiness or my own;

and mine at least is staked upon this issue. For all that the world contains, of joyful or of fortunate, I would not peril yours, Agnes. On this account, when Monsieur de Brives sought your hand, I hid my love for you in my own heart, lest ancient regard, and youthful fondness for an old dear friend should bias your judgment towards one unsuited to you. And I would fain have let you see a little more of life, before I bound you by any tie to one much older than yourself. But I can refrain no longer, Agnes; and, having spoken, I must know my fate. Will you be mine, sweet love?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" whispered Agnes, throwing her arms round his neck. "I am yours—I ever have been yours—I ever will be yours. You cannot make me otherwise, do what you will."

"I will never try," replied Jean Charost, kissing her. "Dear mother," he continued, as Madame de Brecy re-entered the room. "Here is now your daughter indeed. I know you cannot love her more than you do; but you

will love her now for my sake as well as her own."

Madame de Brecey held wide her arms, and Agnes flew to her bosom.

"My child, my dear child!" exclaimed the old lady. "But calm yourself, Agnes. Here is Martin Grille come to say the litter is ready. Let us go."

"Ah, I thought how it would be," said Martin Grille to himself. "I never saw dear friendships between a man under forty, and a girl under sixty, end otherwise.—My lord," he added aloud, "the litter is ready, and all the men-at-arms you named. The rest, however, seem somewhat surly at being left behind; for I think they have had enough of being besieged. I am sure I have: I shall not get that big gun out of my head for the next month."

"Tell them there is a truce for three days," said Jean Charost; "and if at the end of that time war is not at an end, I will return and join them. We must not strip the Castle of its defenders."

In a few minutes Jean Charost and his little cavalcade were beyond the walls of Bourges ; but Madame de Brecey remarked that they did not take the way towards their own well-loved home ; but, passing the river Langis, directed their course towards Pressavois.

"Where are you taking us, Jean?" she said to her son, who was riding beside the litter.

"To the Castle of Filard, my dear mother," replied Jean Charost. "I promised the Queen that I would bring you and Agnes thither for a day. I am in great favor at Court now," he added, gaily, "for my having had some share in bringing about this negotiation. The King, indeed, seems somewhat moody and irritable ; but not with me ; and he insists that I shall take part in the conferences to be held this night at Pressavois. Nay, dearest mother—no objections on the score of dress and equipment ; for, let me tell you, the Court is in travelling guise as well as we are, and you will

find more soiled and dusty apparel there than we bring into it."

Madame de Brecy was in some trepidation ; for it was long, long since she had moved in courts; and the retired and quiet life which she had passed for years unfitted her for such scenes. She made no opposition, however, and in somewhat less than half an hour, the little cavalcade began to fall in with the outposts of the King's army. There was no difficulty in passing them, however ; for, from the moment the truce was proclaimed, the soldiers on both parts concluded that some agreement would be arrived at between the different factions, and began to mingle together with as much gaiety and good will as if they had never drawn the sword against each other. Groups were seen galloping about the fields in different directions, standing and talking together upon the road, riding rapidly about to and fro between Pressavois and Bourges ; and the scene presented all the gaiety and brilliancy of war without any of its terrors.

Shortly after passing the second line of posts upon the high road, Jean Charost led the way down a narrow lane, which seemed to plunge into a deep, heavy wood. All was now quiet and solitary, and nothing was seen around for nearly half a mile but the waving branches of great old trees. The undulations of the ground were so slight, that no eminence gave a view over the prospect; and all that varied their course as they advanced were the strongly contrasted lines of light and shade that crossed the road from time to time.

At length, however, the lane turned sharply, an open space was presented to view, and the ancient Chateau of Felard, which has long since given place to the present modern structure, rose upon the sight in the midst. It had towers and turrets, walls, ditch, and drawbridge, like most large country houses at that time; but it was by no means defensible against any regular force, and was only chosen for the residence of the Court on account of the accommodation it afforded. Charles the Seventh

had not yet learned to dread the approach of his subjects to his person, to see poison in his food, and an enemy in every stranger; and the gates were wide open, without guards, and nothing but a few pages in attendance lingering about.

Descending in the outer court, Jean Charost assisted his mother and Agnes to alight, and then led them on to the principal entrance of the building, where they were shown into a vacant chamber to wait the pleasure of the Queen.

"Have the courtesy," said Jean Charost to the page, "to let Messire Jacques Cœur know that I am here, after you have informed the Queen." And, turning to his mother, whose face brightened at the name of her old friend, he added—"I only saw him for an instant last night; but his presence was most serviceable in obtaining for me speedy audience."

At the end of about five minutes, the door opened, and a lady entered alone, the richness of whose apparel, and, perhaps still more, the

brilliance of her beauty, made Madame de Brecey suppose that she beheld the Queen. Jean Charost, however, addressed her as Mademoiselle de St. Geran, and introduced his mother and Agnes to her, not altogether without some embarrassment in his manner.

Agnes Sorel did not seem to remark it, however, spoke frankly and kindly to Madame de Brecey, and then, turning to Agnes, gazed upon her with a look of deep interest.

“So this is your Agnes,” she said, turning to Jean Charost. “Oh, de Brecey do not bring her into courts. They are not places for such flowers as this. Is not that a hard speech, my dear young lady? Doubtless your young imagination has painted courts as very brilliant places; but I myself know, from sad experience, that they are fields where little grows but sorrows, disappointments, and regrets.”

“I have no inclination, indeed, madam, ever to mingle with them,” replied Agnes.

But Agnes Sorel was, by this time, in a deep

fit of meditation, and seemed not to hear the fair girl's reply. After a minute's silence, however, she turned quickly to Jean Charost, and said—

“Why did you call her Agnes?”

“Youthful regard for yourself, I believe, was the chief motive,” he answered, frankly. “I had seen you, dear lady, in many a trying situation. You had generously, nobly, befriended me even at that time; and I wished this dear girl to be like you.”

Agnes Sorel shook her head slowly and sorrowfully, with an air which seemed to speak as plainly as words: “You wish so no longer.” Suddenly, however, she roused herself, and said, with a sweet smile—

“I had almost forgotten my duty. Her Majesty has commanded me to bring you to her apartments. If you will follow me, Madame de Brecy, I will show you the way, and afterwards will show you your lodging.”

CHAPTER XIII.

Just behind the old stone cross on the green of the little village of St. Privé, about half a mile south of Pressavois, a large pavilion was erected, not far from the bank of the river. Between the two poles which supported it, was spread a great table, covered with writing materials, and with two or three candlesticks placed in no very seemly order. Two men, who appeared to be clerks, were seated at the table, mending pens, and venting dry jokes at one another; and round about the pavilion, at the distance of about fifty yards on either side, patrolled a number of archers of the King's guard, to keep prying eyes and curious ears afar. For about a quarter of an hour, the tent remained vacant of all but the clerks; but, at the end of that time, a group of several gentle-

men entered it, and took their place on the northern side of the table, not sitting down, but standing together, and conversing earnestly, though in low tones. Shortly after, Jean Charost and Monsieur Blondel appeared, and, joining the others, took part in their conversation. Then came Richmond, la Marche, and Clermont, with several other gentlemen of their faction; but these remained to the south of the table, although an occasional word or two passed between them and those on the other side.

“Does his Majesty come in person?” said Richmond, at length, in his deep-toned voice.

“On my life, I know not,” replied Blondel; “but, of course, I should suppose not, my Lord Constable.”

“Then what do we wait for?” asked Richmond, again.

“Monsieur la Trimouille is, I believe, commissioned by the King to treat,” answered

Jean Charost,—“at least, I heard so, my Lord, while I was at the Castle of Felard.”

“By the Lord, he must come soon, then,” ejaculated Richmond, with a discontented air, “or no treating will there be at all; for I am not going to lacquey a Trimouille, and wait upon his Lordship’s pleasure.”

A few minutes more passed in gloomy silence, and then the sound of horses coming fast was heard upon the road, through the canvass walls of the tent. The next instant, la Trimouille himself, a tall, powerful, handsome man, entered the pavilion, leaning on the arm of Juvenel de Royans, his countryman and connexion, and followed by Dunois and several others.

“I beg your pardon, gentlemen, for keeping you waiting,” he said, with the blandest possible smile; “but I had to hear his Majesty’s pleasure, in order that there might be no doubt or difficulty upon our part. Let us be seated, and discuss this matter.”

Each one took his seat at the table without much order; the party of the King on one side—for kings were heads of parties in those days—and the party of the three Counts on the other.

A pause ensued, which seemed to fret the spirit of Richmond; for at length he spoke, after giving a snort like a wild horse, exclaiming—

“Some one speak, in Heaven’s name! What are we here for?—not to sit silent, I suppose. Speak, Trimouille!”

“Right willingly, my Lord Constable,” replied Trimouille. “You are aware you are in arms against the King, your Sovereign.”

“False to begin with!” cried Richmond. “I am in arms against favourites and Court flatterers—in arms to restore to the King the right use of his own authority, for the good of the nation and the safety of the land.”

“In arms against me, you would say,” retorted Trimouille, with a dark spot on his brow, which belied the smile upon his lips. “But

let us hear what you complain of. I know of nothing done by me which can justify such acts as yours. However, if you have cause, state it before the gentlemen here present, who are commissioned by his Majesty, as well as myself, to enquire into this matter, and will report to him every word you say without gloss or comment, such as you accuse me of making: What are your griefs, my Lords?"

"Heavy enough," replied Richmond, sternly. "Your ingratitude, Trimouille, I could pass over; but—"

"My ingratitude!" exclaimed the King's minister. "I know not that you have given me cause to be grateful or ungrateful."

"Did I not place you where you are?" demanded Richmond. "Did I not remove better men than yourself to place you there? Did I not force Louvet from the Council to make room for you, and punish the audacity of Beaulieu—"

"And drown Giac," interposed the Count of Clermont, with a sarcastic smile; and all around

the table laughed, except Trimouille himself, who had married the dangerous widow of the deceased nobleman. He waved his hand, however, saying—

“This is all trifling. I hold the place I occupy by the King’s favor and approval, and by the act of no other man. But you are in arms, you say, for the public service. What has been done to you to give a colour to this pretence?”

“I will tell you,” replied Richmond, bitterly, “You have frustrated all my plans for the service of the state. During this last campaign in Brittany, you kept me idle before Pontorson for want of men and money, or it would have fallen a week before it did. The same was the case before St. Janes; and now, for the last four months, not a livre have I been able to wring from your hands, either for my own pay, or to keep my men on foot.”

“You have been able to keep them on foot to war against your monarch,” said Trimouille, bitterly. “But I will meet the charge with

frankness and truth. I have not sent you money when you demanded it, for the same reason that I did not send any to my Lord, the Count la Marche here, to whom I eagerly wished to send it. Simply, because I had it not to send."

"A mere pretence!" exclaimed Richmond, striking the table with his fist, and rising as he spoke. "We have found in the papers of Jacques Cœur, which we seized in Bourges, proof positive that a large sum was sent to Chinon at the very time you refused my demand."

"Which was all forestalled before it came," returned la Trimouille.

But his voice was drowned by the angry tones of the Constable, who exclaimed—

"If we are again to be put off with such pitiful excuses as that, negotiation can produce no good."

And he turned to leave the tent.

The Counts of la Marche and Clermont rose also; but Jean Charost cried—

"Stay, I beseech you, my Lords. Consider what you are doing. Casting away the safety of France, giving her up a prey to the enemy, not only sacrificing your loyalty to your King, but your duty to your country. If there be one particle of patriotism, or of generosity, or of honor, in you, stay and listen to what Monsieur la Trimouille has to propose."

The word "propose" was happily chosen, holding out vague ideas of advantages to be obtained which affected both Clermont and la Marche.

"What shall we do, Richmond?" said the latter, in a hesitating tone.

"Stay, if you will," responded the Constable, gruffly. "You can act for me if you choose to remain. I shall go; for I shall only lose my temper."

Thus saying, he quitted the tent. La Marche and Clermont hesitated, for a moment, and then returned to their seats; the latter observ-

ing, with a quiet sneer, that the Constable, lately, had given them more fire than light.

"Well, gentlemen," said Trimouille, in his most placable tones, "now this hot spirit is gone, we are likely to come to some result. Pray let me hear your demands."

The Count la Marche turned a somewhat puzzled look towards the Count of Clermont, and the latter laughed gaily.

"Speak, I beseech you," said la Trimouille. "What are your demands?"

"Why, the first which we decided upon," replied the Count of Clermont, "was one so unpleasant to utter, that it sticks in the throat of la Marche here—simply your removal from the Council of the King, Monsieur la Trimouille."

"I will not stand in the way," returned the minister, with the utmost frankness of manner. "No personal interest of mine shall prevent an accommodation. But of course upon this point the King alone can decide. It shall

be referred to him, exactly as you state it. Let us pass on to other things. What more do you demand?"

"Nay, we would rather hear what you have to propose," said the Count of Clermont, who began to doubt how the negotiations would turn.

"I will willingly take the lead," said Trimouille; "for his Majesty's intentions are kind and generous. First, however, it is necessary to state how matters stand, in order to show that it is by no compulsion the King acts, but merely from his gracious disposition. Here are three noblemen, two of them closely allied to the blood royal, who take arms against their Sovereign at a time when disunion is likely to be fatal to the State. The two I have mentioned, his Majesty believes to have been misled by the third, an imperious, violent man, over-estimating both his services and his abilities—"

"Nay, nay," interposed the Count la Marche.

ing, with a quiet sneer, that La Trimouille lately, had given them more state to the King

"Well, gentlemen," and publicly boasts most placable tones to them at his pleasure. gone, we are like to actually seize upon a Pray let me hear the royal garrison in

The Court King, judging it necessary puzzled the proceedings at once, marches and the rebels—and in great force.

"Plainly, my Lords, you have five men in and about Bourges. He has advanced men between you and Paris, five more arrived an hour ago at La Hire, and a large force under la Hire is marching up from Chateauroux."

He paused, and the countenances of the Constable's party fell immensely. However, the Count of Clermont replied, with his usual sarcastic smile—

"A perilous situation, as you represent it, my good Lord; but methinks I have heard an old fable, which shows that men and lions may paint pictures differently."

"You will find my picture the true one, Clermont," said Trimouille, coolly. "I have taken care not to exaggerate it in the least; and both the generosity with which the King treats you, and the firmness with which his Majesty will adhere to his determinations, will prove to you that he is convinced of these facts likewise. He is desirous, however, that Frenchman should never be seen shedding Frenchman's blood, and therefore he proposes, in mitigation of all griefs, real or supposed, and also as a mark of his love and regard for his good cousin, the Count of la Marche, to bestow upon him the fief of Besançon. To you, Monsieur de Clermont, he offers to give the small town of Montbrison, or some other, at your choice, of equal value. To the other noblemen and gentlemen I see around you, and whose names were furnished to me this morning, each a benefice, the list of which I have here; and all this upon the sole condition that they return to their loyalty, and serve the

Crown against the common enemy, with zeal, fidelity, and obedience."

"And the Count of Richmond," interrogated la Marche.

"What for the Constable?" asked the Count of Clermont.

A heavy frown came upon la Trimouille's brow. He had remarked keenly the effect produced upon the Constable's companions by the offers made, and saw that the faction was in reality broken up; and he replied, in a slow, stern tone—

"Permission for him to retire unmolested to Parthenay, and live in peace and privacy."

A dead silence pervaded all the tent, which was first broken by Jean Charost, who saw both peril and injustice in the partiality just shown, and attributed it rightly to la Trimouille's personal enmity towards his former friend.

"Nay, my good Lord," he exclaimed. "Surely his Majesty will be moved to some less strict dealing with the Lord Constable."

"What! you, sir?" cried la Trimouille, in a sharp and angry tone.

"Yes, my good Lord," replied de Brecy. "I had his Majesty's own commands to be present here, and, as he said, to moderate between contending claims; and I shall feel it my duty to urge him strongly to reconsider the question in regard to the Count of Richmond, whom I do not mean to defend for the part he has taken with these two noble Counts; but who has formerly served the Crown well, and is only a sharer in the same faults as themselves."

"You had better be silent Monsieur de Brecy," said la Trimouille, with a lowering brow.

"My Lord, I was not sent here to be silent," said de Brecy; "and, in speaking, I only obey the King's own commands."

"Then go to the King, and hear what he says now," returned la Trimouille, putting on a more placable air. "I have seen him since

yourself, and received his last directions. Go to him, I say, I am quite willing."

De Brecey fell into the trap.

"I will," he said, rising. "If you will proceed with all other points, I will be back before you can conclude."

La Trimouille saw him depart, with a smile; but no sooner heard his horse's feet than, sure of his advantage, he hurried on all the proceedings of the conference, threw in an inducement here, promised a greater advantage there, employed all the means he had kept in reserve of working upon the selfishness of the Constable's late confederates, and in less than twenty minutes had triumphed completely over faith and friendship and generosity to Richmond. He made the descent easy, however, by leaving all questions concerning the Constable to be settled afterwards; and succeeded in obtaining a written promise from la Marche and Clermont to return to their duty, and sub-

mit to the King's will, without any condition whatever in favor of Richmond.

His leave-taking was hasty, as soon as this was accomplished; and, mounting his horse with all speed, he galloped back to Felard as fast as he could go. There, approaching the building by the back, he hurried up to the King's apartments, and enquired eagerly if Monsieur de Brecy had obtained admission.

"No, my Lord," replied the attendant. "His Majesty was fatigued, and lay down to rest for an hour. We therefore refused Monsieur de Brecy admission."

"You must not refuse me," said la Trimouille.

The man hesitated; but the minister passed him boldly, and knocked at a door on the opposite side of the ante-room. A moment after, he disappeared within, and then the murmur of conversation was heard, apparently eager, but not loud.

At the end of about five minutes, la Trimouille looked out, saying to the attendants—

“ If Monsieur de Brecey returns to seek an audience, tell him his Majesty will see him at the general reception this evening, for which he is invited.”

Then, drawing back, he closed the door.

CHAPTER XIV.

MANY are the perils of greatness ; but, amongst them all, few are more disastrous than that of being subject continually to influences the most corrupt, which poison the stream of human action almost at the fountain head. False representations, sneers, inuendoes, mis-statements, are ever fluttering about the heads of princes, guard themselves how they will against them ; and I have seen the base, the treacherous, the coward, and the fool, raised to office, honor, and emolument ; the good, the wise, the just, and the true, rejected, neglected, and despised by men, not feeble-minded, not corrupt themselves, but strong in intellect, clear of sight, and with the highest and the noblest purposes. Princes and powerful men can but, as others do, judge

and decide from what they see and hear ; and the very atmosphere around them is misty with falsehood, their very closet is an echo which repeats little else but lies.

There was a great hall in the Chateau of Felard, and in it, about nine o'clock, were assembled many of the prime nobility of France. Gay habits were there, and handsome forms ; and, being so numerous, the party of course comprised some who were good and wise. It consisted principally of men, indeed ; but ladies were likewise present—the Queen herself, Agnes Sorel, several high dames of Berri, and ladies attending upon the Court.

The young King, graceful and handsome, stood at the upper end of the hall, by the side of his wife. Various guests from time to time advanced, spoke a few words to him, and passed on. All seemed gay and smiling. The news had spread that the principal conditions of a treaty of accommodation with the late rebels had been signed ; and joy and satisfaction

at a result so greatly to be desired, yet which had been so little expected, diffused a cheerfulness like sunshine over all.

Little did he who had first suggested the steps which had led to such a conclusion, and who had principally contributed to their adoption, dream at that moment of the evil that awaited himself.

Jean Charost, after several persons of higher station than himself, had passed the King's presence, advanced with a grave air from the end of the circle near which he stood. His countenance was calm, and well assured, though thoughtful; and his eyes were raised direct to the monarch. He could see a dark cloud suddenly come upon Charles's face; and la Trimouille, who was at some little distance from the King, immediately drew nearer to him. The King bowed his head somewhat ungraciously in answer to de Brecy's salutation; and then, seeing him pause, without passing on, said harshly—

“What is it, Monsieur de Brecy? Speak, if you have anything to say.”

De Brecy instantly divined that the King had been prepossessed; but that ancient spirit which had led him as a mere boy with the Duke of Orleans, to speak his mind plainly, had not been beaten out of him, even by all the hard blows of the world; and he replied, with one glance at his mother and Agnes, who stood at a little distance from the Queen, but who he could have wished had not been present,

“I have something to say, Sire, which I would not venture to say at present, had you not yourself appointed this as my hour of audience.”

The King slowly nodded his head, as if directing him to proceed; and Jean Charost continued—

“To-day, by your commands, I took part in the conference at Pressavois, and gladly found that your Majesty was disposed to be

most gracious to a number of your vassals and subjects who had ventured to take arms upon very shallow pretexts against your authority. Although no motive was necessary to explain your clemency, the motive which Monsieur la Trimouille did express, was to re-unite all Frenchmen in the service of the country. One solitary exception was made in this act of grace and goodness, and that exception was against a nobleman, who, whatever may have been his faults lately, has, in times past, served the Crown with zeal, skill, and courage."

The frown was darkening more and more heavily on Charles's brow every moment ; but he did not speak ; and Jean Charost went on boldly.

"I have ventured to believe, Sire, that you might be led to mitigate the severity of your just anger against the Constable, and to consider former services, as well as present faults ; to remember how useful he *has* been, and may be still, to France, and might be even induced to

extend to him the same grace and favor which you held out to his comrades in offence."

"Did you hear my will expressed by Monsieur la Trimouille?" demanded the King, sternly, and in a loud tone.

"I heard what he was pleased to say was your will, Sire," replied de Brecy; "but I presumed to differ with Monsieur la Trimouille, and to think that, by proper representations to your Majesty, which I believed had not been made, you might be brought to re-consider your decision, and be gracious in all, as well as in a part."

"And you expressed that difference at the Council table?" interrogated Charles.

"I did, Sire," replied de Brecy; "judging it necessary to the safety of France to do so."

"For which, sir," said the King, aloud, and using the imperious plural, representing the many powers united in a King; "for which, sir, we banish you from our Court and presence, and make you share the punishment of the

fault you have defended. You did your best to frustrate our purposes, entrusted to the execution of our minister—you nearly rendered abortive his efforts to bring about a pacification necessary to the welfare of the country; and it is probable that, had you remained on the spot, that pacification would not have been accomplished. We would have you know, and all know, that we will be obeyed. We have punished the rebellion of the Count of Richmond more leniently perhaps than his offence required, taking into full consideration his former services, but weighing well the fact that he was the head and leader, the chief and instigator, of the conspiracy in which the rest were but his deluded followers. Unwarned by his example, you thought fit to oppose our will at our very Council table; and we therefore inflict on you the same punishment as on him. The only grace we can grant you is, to leave you the choice of your retreat, within ten miles of which, wherever it may be, we require you

to limit your movements. Say, whither will you go ?”

The first part of the King’s speech had surprised and confounded de Brecy ; but he gradually recovered himself as the monarch went on. He had long seen that Trimouille had sought to establish an almost despotic authority over the Court of France ; and he easily divined that Charles was not speaking his own sentiments, but those of his minister. This was some consolation ; and he had completely recovered himself before the King ended. It was more by chance, however, than anything else, that, thus suddenly called upon, he fixed on a place of retreat.

“ By your Majesty’s permission,” he replied, “ I will retire to Briare. I have, however, some weighty business to conclude, having been too much engaged in your Majesty’s service to visit Brecy for several years. May I crave permission to remain a few days in that part of the country ?”

"We give you three days," said the King, coldly inclining his head.

"It will need every exertion to accomplish what I have to do in the time," answered Jean Charost, with much mortification in his tone. "I will, therefore, beg leave to retire to Brecy this very night. Come, my dear mother. Come, Agnes," he continued, taking a step back.

"Hold!" cried the King. "Madame de Brecy, of course we do not oppose your departure with your son; but, as for this young lady, we have had reason to believe, very lately, that the right to her guardianship exists in us rather than in Monsieur de Brecy. She must remain at our Court, and under the protection of the Queen, till such time, at least, as the matter is enquired into."

A red, angry glow spread over de Brecy's face; and Agnes herself was starting forward, as if to cling to him in that moment of anguish and indignation but Agnes Sorel laid

her hand upon her arm, and held her back, whispering eagerly—

“Do not oppose the King now. If you refrain, all may yet be well. Resist you cannot, and opposition will be destruction.”

“He has brought her up from infancy, my Lord the King,” said Madame de Brecey, in an imploring tone. “I know of no one who could have so good a right to her guardianship as himself.”

“Dare he venture to say he has any right to her guardianship at all?” asked the King—“that that guardianship is his by blood, or that he has received it from one competent to give it?”

“Perhaps not, Sire,” replied de Brecey, boldly; “but I know of no one who has a better right than myself.”

His eyes were flashing, his face heated, his whole frame trembling with emotion; and, with his free and possibly rash habit of expressing his thoughts, it is impossible to tell what he might have said; but Dunois and Juvenel de Royans took him by the arms, and forcibly

drew him away from the King's presence towards a door at the end of the ladies and gentlemen, on the King's right hand.

As this painful and exciting scene had proceeded, the open space before the monarch had been gradually crowded, the ring around had become narrower; and de Brecy was soon lost to the monarch's eyes in the number of persons around him. Dunois paused for a moment there, urging something to which Jean Charost gave no heed; but, nearly at the same instant, a small hand was laid upon his arm, and the voice of Agnes Sorel said, in a low, earnest tone—

“Leave her to me, de Brecy—leave her to me. I know all you fear; but, by my Christian faith, I will protect her, and guard her from all evil. Here—here; give your mother your arm, and, for Heaven's sake, for your own sake, for her sake, do not irritate the King.”

De Brecy heard no more; but, with the heaviest heart that had ever rested in his bosom, suffered Dunois to lead him from the hall.

Juvenel de Royans followed, and, when they reached the vestibule beyond, he wrung de Brecy's hand hard, saying—

“This is my fault. All my foolish chattering. But, by the Lord, I will set it right before I have done, or I will cut my cousin Trimouille's heart out of his body.”

With these words, he turned sharply, and re-entered the hall.

CHAPTER XV.

For Jean Charost, a period of lethargy, I may almost call it, succeeded the scene last described—a dull, idle, heavy dream, a torpor of the spirit as well as of the body. It is not the man of many emotions who has the deepest: it is he who has had the power, either from temperament or the force of character, to resist them. His spirit has not been worn by them; his heart has not been soiled by them; and when, at length, they seize upon him and conquer him, they have something to grasp.

It was thus with de Brecy. He had never known love. The circumstances in which he had been placed, the constant occupation, the frequent moving from place to place, and the absence of any of those little incidents which plant and nourish passion, had left his life

without the record of anything more than a mere passing inclination ; but, when love seized upon him, it took possession of him entirely, filled him for a few days with hope and joy, and now plunged him into that spiritless lethargy. The events which were passing around him in France came upon him as a vision : like the ancient prophet, he saw things in a trance, but having his eyes open ; and they must be pictured to the reader in the same way that they appeared to him.

A large, fine city, on a beautiful river, is besieged by a numerous army. Its fortifications are old and insufficient, the troops within it scanty, the preparations small. The cannon thunder upon it, mines explode beneath its walls, the enemy march to its assault ; but they are driven back, and Orleans remains untaken. There is a bridge, the key, as it were, to the city. It is attacked, defended, attacked again. An old castle seems its only protection. The castle is attacked and taken by the enemy, and a man of magnificent pre-

sence, calm, and grave, and gentle, mounts the highest tower therein to direct his soldiery against the city. Suddenly, the stone ball of a large cannon strikes the window at which he stands; and Salisbury is carried away, to die a few hours after of his wounds.

The city still holds out: the attacks have diminished in fierceness; but round about the devoted place, the English lines are drawn on every side, pressing it closer and closer, till famine begins to reign within the walls. There is a battle in the open fields some miles from the besieged place. Waggons and tumbrils are in the midst, and gallant men, with the lily banner over them, fight gallantly, but fight in vain. They fly—at length they fly. The bravest hearts in France turn from the fatal field, and all is rout, and slaughter, and defeat. Surely, surely, Orleans must fall, and all the open country beyond the Loire submit to the invader.

Let us turn away our eyes from this scene to another.

The King's Council has assembled at Chinon: the news of the defeat has reached them. Hope, courage, constancy, are lost. They advise their monarch to abandon Orleans to its fate, to abandon Berri and Touraine, and make his last struggle in the mountains of Auvergne. The counsels of despair had been spoken; and it is not wonderful that a young man, fond of pleasure, ruled by favourites, weary of strife, contention, and cabal, should listen to them with a longing for repose, and tranquility, and enjoyment. Oh, how often is it in this working-day world of ours that the most active, the most energetic, the most enduring, thirst, with a burning thirst, such as the wanderer of the desert hardly knows, for the cool refreshment of a little peace. The monarch stands in his own cabinet, not quite alone; for a beautiful figure is kneeling at his feet. She raises her eyes to his face with looks of love and tenderness, yet full of energy and fire.

“Never, never, my Charles,” she exclaims. “Never, my King and master ! Oh, never let it be said that the King of France embraced the counsels of fear, rather than of courage—fled without need—turned from his enemy before he was defeated ! It is God’s will that gives the victory ; but it is for you to struggle for it. What if the courage of the people of Orleans faint ?—what if a battle is lost ?—what if the English pass the Loire?”

“All this is true, or will be true, within a month, my Agnes,” replied the King, in a tone of deep despondency. “I cannot prevent it. Suppose it happened—what could I do then ?”

“Mount your horse—set your lance into rest—give your standard to the wind—call France around you—march against the enemy—fight—fight—and, if need be, die ! I will go with you—die with you, if it must be so. There is nothing for me on earth, but you and France. God pardon us that it is so ; but I have

given, and you have taken from me, all else."

Charles shook his head mournfully; and Agnes Sorel rose slowly from her knees, and drew a step back.

"Then pardon me, my Lord," she said, "if I retire from your Royal Court to that of his Highness the Duke of Bedford. It was predicted to me long ago, by a learned astrologer, that I should belong to the greatest prince of my time. I fondly fancied I had found him; but I must have been mistaken." And she retired a step or two as if to quit the room.

"Stay, Agnes, stay!" cried Charles. "Stay if you love me!"

Agnes sprang back again, and cast her arms around his neck.

"Love you!" she echoed. "God knows I love but too well; and though our love has humbled, debased, and dishonored *me*, if it is to last, it must raise, and elevate, and animate *you*. For my sake, Charles, if not your own,

cast far away the base thoughts which others have suggested. Take the nobler part which your own heart would prompt, dare all, encounter all, and save France, yourself, and Agnes ; for, be sure, I will never outlive the freedom of my country. Many a noble heart is yet beating in our France : many a strong arm is yet ready to strike for her ; and it needs but the appearance of the King in the field, and proofs of strong determination upon his part, to quell the factions which distract the land, and gather every noble spirit round his King. Whatever your love may have done to injure me, oh, let my love for you lead you to safety, honor, and renown."

"Well, be it so," cried Charles, infected by her enthusiasm. "I swear by all I hold most sacred, I will not go back before the enemy. Let him cross the Loire—let Orleans fall—let every traitor leave me—let every faint heart counsel flight—I will meet him in the field, and peril all on one last blow, free France, or die !"

Let us back to the besieged city again. Gaunt famine is walking in the streets; eager-faced men, and hollow-eyed women, are seen prowling about, and vainly seeking food. Closer, closer, draw the lines around the place: the bridge is broken down as a last resource; but the enemy's cannon thunder still, and the hands are feeble that point those which are on the walls. Suddenly, there is a cry that help is coming, that food is on the way, food and an army to force an entrance. There is a feeble flash of joy and hope; but it soon goes out. Men ask, who is it leads the host—who brings the promised succour? A woman—a young girl of seventeen years of age. Some say a saint—and some a fool; and many weep with bitter disappointment.

Nevertheless, on the day named, the ramparts are crowded, people go up to the towers and to the belfries. What do they see? A fleet of boats coming up the river, an army marching up the bank, lances and banners, pennons and bright arms; still, the heart

of the inhabitants, though beating with interest and expectation, hardly admit hope. They have seen French armies as bright and gay fly before those hardy islanders, who are now marching out of their lines to attack the escorting force : they have seen succour as near them intercepted on the way. But right onwards towards them moves the host of France. Quicker, quicker, at the march, at the trot, at the gallop. Band mingles with band, spear crosses spear, the flag of France advances still, the boats sweep on and reach the city ; and shouts of joy ring through the air ; but not shouts so loud, nor warm, nor triumphant, as those which greet that young girl as she rides through the streets of the city she had succoured. But she was not content to succour : she came to deliver ; and forth she goes again to plant her banner between the walls and the besieging lines, and there she sleeps, lulled by the roar of artillery.

Again the Maid of Arc is in the field, again

the standard of France is in her hand, and on she bears it from success to success. The enemy's forts are taken, the lines swept, the castle of the bridge re-captured, Orleans delivered, and her name united with it in everlasting memory.

Joy, hope, confidence, returned to France, and men's hearts were open to each other, after they had long been closed.

Gergeau, Beaugency, and many another small town, was taken ; and across a country, delivered from his enemies, the King of France marched on to take his crown at Rheims.

CHAPTER XVI.

FLITTING, like shadows in a mist, came many great events in the history of France about that time, hardly known or appreciated by any but those who were the immediate actors in them ; but, amidst them all, with a heavy heart, and a dejected spirit, Jean Charost remained in exile at Briare. Why he had chosen that small town for the place of his retreat, he himself hardly knew ; for, although no human action is probably without its motive, some motives are so quick and lightning-like, that all traces of them are instantly lost, even in the cloud from which they issue.

It might be that Jean Charost had been thinking deeply of the words of Juvenel de Royans, from the second night of the siege of the citadel of Bourges till the moment when his

sentence of banishment from the Court was spoken ; and that he had fully made up his mind to go thither sooner or later to converse with the Abbot Lomelini. No other inducement indeed could be imagined ; for Briare was then, as now, a very dull, small place, with its single street and hardly defensible walls, and nothing to recommend it but the smiling banks of the Loire, and the fine old Abbey at the highest point of the whole town.

Dull enough in truth it was to Jean Charost, without one object of interest, one source of occupation. Filial love, too, had deprived him of the consolation of his mother's company. The journey from Brecy to Briare he thought was too long, the difficulties and dangers in the way too numerous, for her to encounter them without risk to her health or to her life ; and he had persuaded her to remain, and keep the management of his estates in her own hands.

Thus, with a few servants, he remained at the principal inn of the place, poorly lodged

and poorly fed ; but heeding little the convenience or inconvenience of the body in the dull, heavy anguish of the heart. His spirit fretted sorely within him ; yet he did not venture to resist the sentence of the King, unjust as it might be.

It was a strange state that France was in at that period. Nobles would actually take arms against the Royal authority at one moment, and submit to the most arbitrary decrees the next ; and not only did de Brecey remain at Briare in obedience to the King's command, but Richmond, with all his impetuous spirit, lingered on at Parthenay for months.

For some days after his arrival at his place of exile, Jean Charost, occupied with other thoughts, forgot Lomelini entirely ; and, when he did remember him, and recalled the words which de Royans had spoken, he asked himself—

“Why should I seek for information which may probably confirm the King's claim to the disposal of her I love ?”

Man's mind, however, abhors uncertainty. That thirst for knowledge which was kindled in Paradise is upon us still. We would rather know evil than know nothing. On the fourth day, towards even-tide, he set out and walked up to the Abbey, and paused in the gray light, looking at the gray gates. One of the brethren, gazing forth, asked him if he would come in, and see the church; and then de Brecey enquired for the Abbot, and if he were still brother Lomelini.

The monk replied in the affirmative; but said the Abbot seldom received any one after sun-set, unless he came on business of importance, or was an old friend.

"I am an old friend," replied Jean Charost. "Tell him Monsieur de Brecey is here. I will wait till you return."

He was speedily admitted, and Lomelini seemed really glad to see him. He had become an old man indeed, with hair as white as silver; had grown somewhat bowed and corpulent, and was slightly querulous withal. He com-

plained of many things : of man's ingratitude, the dullness of the place of his abode, the forgetfulness of friends, the perils of the land, and all those matters easily borne by the robust spirit of youth, but which age magnifies into intolerable burdens. Still he seemed gratified with Jean Charost's visit, and besought him to stay and take a homely supper with him—poor monastic fare.


But, during the course of the evening, and of the meal with which it concluded, the visitor found that his old acquaintance had lost none of that quiet subtlety which had distinguished him in other days, and that his taste for good things was in no degree diminished. It had increased, indeed. Like an old dog, eating was his only pleasure. He had become both a glutton and an epicure.

Before he took his departure, de Brece asked openly and boldly for the papers which de Royans had mentioned. Lomelini looked surprised and bewildered, and assured him that Monsieur de Royans had made a mistake.

"I recollect nothing about them whatever," he said, with an air of so much sincerity, that Jean Charost, though he had acquired a keener insight into character than in former times, did not even doubt him.

He went back from time to time to see the old man, who always appeared glad of his society ; and indeed Jean Charost could not doubt that company of any kind was a relief to one who was certainly not formed by Nature to pass his days in a monastery. He remarked however, that Lomelini would, from time to time, look at him from under his shaggy, white eye-brows with a gaze of cunning enquiry, as if he expected something, or sought to discover something ; but, the moment their eyes met, the Abbot's were averted again, and he never uttered a word which could give any clue to what was passing in his mind at such moments.

Thus had time passed away, not altogether without relief ; a few hasty lines, sometimes from his mother, sometimes from Agnes Sorel,



sometimes from his own Agnes, gave him information of the welfare of the latter, and cheered his spirits for a day. But often would the momentary sunshine be clouded by dark anxieties and fears.

He had not heard anything for some weeks ; and, after a long ride through the neighbouring country, he was about to retire to rest, when steps came rapidly through the long gallery of the inn, and stopped at his chamber door. A young monk came to tell him that the Abbot, after supper, had been seized with sudden and perilous sickness, and earnestly desired to see him instantly.

Jean Charost hurried up with the messenger to the Abbey, and, being brought into the old man's chamber, instantly perceived that the hand of Death had touched him : the eyes spoke it, the temples spoke it ; it was written in every line.

Lomelini welcomed him faintly ; and, as Jean Charost bent kindly over him, he said, almost in a whisper—

"Bid all the others leave the room—I have something to say to you."

As soon as they were alone together, the old man continued—

"Put your hand beneath my pillow. You will find something there."

Jean Charost obeyed, and drew forth a packet, yellow, and soiled. His own name was written on it in a hand which he recognized at once.

"Something more—something more," said Lomelini.

Searching again, de Brecy found another packet, also addressed to himself; but the seals of this had been broken, though those on the other cover had been left undisturbed. Without ceremony he unfolded the paper, and found within a case of sandal wood inlaid with gold, and bearing the letters M. S. F. twisted into a curious monograph. It opened with two small clasps, and within were two rows of large and brilliant diamonds.

De Brecy's examination was quick and eager;

and, while he made it, the dying man's eyes were fixed upon his countenance.

As he closed the case, Lomelini raised his voice, saying—

“Listen, Seigneur de Brecy.”

Jean Charost put up the packets, and sat down by the old man's side. He could not find it in his heart, at that moment, to speak harshly, although he now easily divined why the packets had been kept from him so long.

“What is it, father?” he said, bending his head.

“What! not an angry word?” exclaimed Lomelini.

“Not one,” replied Jean Charost. “I have too many sorrows of my own, father, to add to yours just now.”

“Well, then, I will tell you all,” said Lomelini. “You think I kept these packets on account of the diamonds. That had something to do with it; but there was more. After you entered the Orleans palace you were trustee

more than I. I had been the keeper of all secrets; you became so. The Duke's daughter was put under your charge, notwithstanding your youth, and I resolved you should never be able to prove her his daughter."

"I knew not that she was so," replied Jean Charost. "The Duke himself knew it not."

"Nay, nay: do not lie," said Lomelini, somewhat bitterly. "I watched you—I watched you both well—I followed you to the Convent of the Celestins, where the murderer had taken sanctuary, and I know the child was made over to you then, though you pretended to find it in the forest."

"On my Christian faith, and honor as a knight," replied de Brecey, "I heard nothing either of murderer or child at the Convent of the Celestins. The dear babe *was* given to me in the forest by a tall, strange, wild-looking man, who seemed to me half crazed."

"St. Florent himself," murmured Lomelini.

"I call Heaven to witness," continued Jean Charost, "I never even suspected any connection between the Duke and that child till long after—I am not even yet sure of it."

"Be sure, then," said Lomelini, faintly. "The Duke took her mother from that mother's husband—carried her off by force one night as she returned from a great *fête* with those very diamonds on her neck."

"By force!" murmured de Brecey; and then, from a feeling difficult to define, he added—"Thank God for that!"

"For what?" said Lomelini. "Doubtless, she went willingly enough. Women will scream, and declare they are made miserable for life, and all that. At all events, she stayed when she was there, and that was her daughter; for I knew the child again as soon as I saw her at the cottage, by a mark upon her temple. The old father died of grief, and the mad husband stole in one night, and stabbed his wife, and carried away the child; and that is all."

He seemed to ramble, and a slight convulsion passed over his face.

"I know the whole," he added; "for I had a share in the whole."

And a deep groan followed.

"Let me call in a priest," said de Brecy. "You have need of the consolations of the church."

"Ay, ay: call in a priest," answered Lomelini, partly raising himself on his arm. "I would not have my corpse kicked about the streets like the carcass of a dog; but do not suppose I believe in any priestly tales, young man. When life goes out, all is ended. I have enjoyed this life. I want no other: I expect no other—I—I fear no other. Surely there is no other. Well, call in a priest. Haste, or you will be too late. Is this faintness? Is this death?"

Jean Charost sprang to the door, near which he found several of the monks. The penitentiary was called for in haste. But he was, as Lomelini had said, too late. They found the

Robert passed away: the chin had dropped; the wide-open eyes seemed to gaze at nothing, and to have nothing within them. Something had departed which man vainly tries to define by words, or to convey by figures. A spirit had gone to learn the emptiness of the dreams of earth.

With a slow step, and deep gloom upon his mind, Jean Charost turned back to his dwelling. As he went, his thoughts were much occupied with the dark, sad material doctrines—philosophy I cannot call them—creed I cannot call them—which at that time were but too common amongst Italian ecclesiastics.

When he was once more in his own chamber, however, he took forth the packets he had received from Lomelini, and opened the cover of the one which had the seals unbroken. It contained a letter from the Duke of Orleans, brief and sad, speaking of the child which de Brecy had adopted, of her mother, and of the jewels contained in the other packet. The Duke acknowledged her as his child, saying:—

“I recognised her at once, by the ring which you showed me, as the daughter of her whom I wronged and have lost. It was taken at the same time that my poor Marie’s life was taken; for, as you doubtless know, she was murdered under my very roof—yes, I say murdered. Had the dagger found my heart instead of hers, another word, perhaps, would have been better fitted; for mine was a sin which merited death. I wronged her: I wronged her murderer.”

He then went on to urge Jean Charost to perform well the task which he had undertaken, and which he had certainly well performed without exhortation; and he ended by saying:—

“I have seen you so far tried, Monsieur de Brecy, that I can trust you entirely. I know that you will be faithful to the task; and, as far as I have power to give authority over my child, I hereby give it to you.”

Those were joyful words to Jean Charost; and for a moment he gave way to wild and

daring hopes. He thought he would claim this right, even against the King himself; but short consideration, and what he knew of the law of France, soon dimmed all expectation of success.

The other papers which the packet contained, were merely letters in a woman's hand, signed Marie de St. Florent; but they were pleasant to Jean Charost's eye; for they showed how the unhappy girl had struggled against her evil fate. In more than one of them she besought the Duke to let her go, to place her in a convent, where, unknown to all the world, she might pass the rest of life in penitence and prayer. They spoke a spirit bowed down; but a heart uncorrupted.

Several hours passed; not so much in the examination of these papers, as in the indulgence of thoughts which they suggested; and it was midway between midnight and morning, when Jean Charost at length lay down upon his bed.

CHAPTER XVII.

DE BRECY woke with a start just in the gray of the morning. His thoughts were confused. He had had troublous dreams. He had fancied himself in the midst of war and strife again ; and the well-known sounds, "*Alerte ! Alerte ! Aux armes ! Aux armes !*" seemed to ring in his ears.

In an instant he had thrown on the furred gown which lay beside him, and had seized his sword ; but the only sound he now heard was a sharp tap at the door, and a voice saying—

"Monsieur de BreCY, Monsieur de BreCY ! Pray let me in ; I wish to speak to you in haste."

Jean Charost opened the door, and to his surprise beheld the face of his good servant, Martin Grille, who had been left at

the Court with Agnes, to attend upon and watch over her. A vague feeling of alarm instantly took possession of de Brecy's heart; and he exclaimed, ere the man could tell his errand,

"How is your lady? Is she ill?"

"No, sir — not ill," replied Martin, "though ill at ease I have a notion; but I have hastened here with such speed that I believe I have left my horse no lungs, nor myself either, any more than a cracked pair of bellows. I have come to warn you, my lord, of a danger that menaces you. So I beseech you, before you hear it, to order all your people to get upon horse-back, and make ready to set out yourself; for there is no great time to lose."

"Nay, I must hear the danger firrst," returned Jean Charost. "What is the matter, my good friend?"

"Well, tell the people to get ready, at all events," said Martin, earnestly; "then you can do as you like. Stories are sometimes long in

telling, questions long in asking, and longer in being answered. It is better always, my lord, to be ready to act upon the news when it comes, than to wait to have to make ready after you have got it."

There was some truth in what he said, and Jean Charost sent by him the orders he desired, nor was he long in giving them.

"Now, tell me all while I am dressing," said his master, as soon as he had returned. "I know no cause for fearing anything; but it is an uncertain world, good Martin, and unseen dangers surround every step."

"This one is plain enough," answered Martin Grille. "Notre Dame is not plainer. It is simply, sir, that the King has sent a certain sergeant of his, with a long troop of archers at his back, to arrest and bring you to his presence. He is now at Bourges, in the house of good Messire Jacques Cœur, which he fills tolerably well; and the distance not being very great from Bourges to Briare, you may expect our friend the sergeant every hour. It was

late at night, however, when the order was given; and master sergeant vowed that he would have a nap first, King or no King. But, vowing I would have no nap, I came away at once; and so you have three good hours, and perhaps a few minutes more."

De Brecey mused; and then asked—

"Do you know any motive for this order?"

"None at all," replied Martin Grille, "nor can I even guess. But I'll tell you all that happened, as I have it from one who saw all. There is one Jeanne de Vendôme about the Court. They call her also Marquise de Mortaigne."

"I have seen her," said Jean Charost.

"What of her? Go on."

"Why, she has a nephew, sir; one Peter of Vendôme," replied Martin Grille, "whom she is very fond of; but he is an enemy of yours."

"I never even saw him," observed de Brecey.

"Well, sir, the King's mind is poisoned against you," said Martin Grille. "That is

clear enough, and I know not what else to attribute it to ; but, upon my word, you had better mount your horse and ride away. I can tell you the rest of the story as we go. I never was a very good horseman ; and, if this sergeant rides better than I, he may be here before we are in the saddle."

"Well, we will go," said Jean Charost, thoughtfully. "Gather all those things together, while I reckon with my host. I would rather not be taken a prisoner into Bourges ; and I think I will prevent it."

He spoke with a slight smile, and yet some bitterness of tone. Martin Grille applied himself at once to pack up all that was in his master's room ; and in about half an hour Jean Charost and his followers were in the saddle.

"Were it not better to take the road to Bussiere, my lord?" asked Martin Grille, who rode somewhat near his master's person. "It seems to me as if you were going towards Oussin."

"No ; methinks we shall be safer on this side," said Jean Charost. " Now, as we ride along, let me hear all that has been passing at the Court. Perhaps I may be able to pick out some cause for this sudden displeasure of the King."


" Well, sir, I am sorry to be obliged to say what I must say," answered Martin Grille. " But the King has treated you very badly. This Peter of Vendôme, whom I was talking about—the devil plague him!—is at the bottom of it all ; though his aunt, who is worse than himself, manages the matter for him. She has taken it into her head that she must ally herself to the Royal family. Now, it runs everywhere at the Court that Mademoiselle Agnes is the daughter of the poor Duke of Orleans, who was killed near the Porte Barbette ; that she was entrusted by him to your care ; and that for ambition you want to marry her, and then tell all the world who she is."

Jean Charost had been gazing in Martin's face

for the last moment or two in silence ; but now he inclined his head slowly, saying—

“Go on. I now see how it is.”

“Well, sir ; about a month ago, this Jeanne de Vendôme proposed to the King that her nephew should marry our young lady, and the King, it would seem, was willing enough ; but a certain beautiful lady you know of, opposed it ; and, as she can do nearly what she likes, for some time the day went with her. Then Jeanne of Vendôme curried favor with Monsieur la Trimouille, who can do nearly what *he* likes on the other side ; and then the day went against us for some time. The King was very violent, and swore that, if he had any power or authority over Mademoiselle Agnes, she should marry Peter of Vendôme ; though she told him all the while she would not, and begged him humbly and devoutly rather to let her go into a nunnery. Kings will have their way, however, sir, and things were looking very bad, when sud-



denly, three days ago, our young lady disappeared."

"Where did she go to? where is she?" asked Jean Charost, sharply.

"That I cannot tell, sir," answered Martin Grille; "but she is safe enough, I am sure; for, when I spoke to Mademoiselle de St. Geran about it, she said, with one of her enchanting smiles—'Has she indeed vanished, my good man? Well, I dare say God will protect her.' But the King did not take it so quietly. He was quite furious, and neither Peter of Vendôme nor his aunt would let his passion cool."

"Doubtless, they attributed it all to me," said Jean Charost, whose face had greatly lighted up within the last few minutes.

But Martin Grille replied, to his surprise—

"I do not think they did, sir. The painted old woman hinted, though she did not venture to say so, that the beautiful lady you wot of, had helped her namesake's escape; and the nephew said, that, if the King would but sign

the papers, he would soon find the fugitive ; for he had a shrewd notion of where she was."

"He did not sign them?" exclaimed Jean Charost, with a look of dread.

"He had well nigh done it, my lord," replied Martin Grille. "Last night, when the King was sitting with the Queen in the large, black room on the second floor, which you remember well—very melancholy he was—for somewhat of a coolness had sprung up between him and her whom he loves best, and he cannot live without her—they brought him in the papers to sign ; that is to say, Peter of Vendôme and his aunt, looking all radiant and triumphant. Some one watched them, however ; for, just at that minute, in came the Chancellor and two or three others, and, amongst them, one of the pages, with a paper in his hand, addressed to the King. The King took it, just looked at the top, and then, handing it up to the Chancellor, was about to sign what Peter of Vendôme demanded, and let him go, when

Monsieur des Ursins—that is the Chancellor—cried—

“ ‘ Hold, your Majesty ! This is important—n good and proper form—and must have your royal attention.’

“ Then he read it out ; but I cannot tell you all that it contained. However, it was a prohibition in good set form against any one disposing of the hand, person, or property, of our young lady Mademoiselle Agnes, either in marriage, wardship, or otherwise, and setting forth that the writer was her true and duly constituted guardian, according to the laws of France. It was signed, St. Florent ; and, though the King was mighty angry, the Chancellor persuaded him not to sign the papers till the right of the appellant, as he called it, was decided by some competent tribunal.”

“ How came you to know all this so accurately ?” asked Jean Charost, after meditating for several minutes over what he had heard.

“ Part one way—part another, my noble

lord," replied Martin Grille. "Principally, however, I learned the facts from a young cousin of mine, who is now chief violin player to the Queen. When she found her husband so dull that night, she sent for Petit Jean to solace him; because she could not very well have sent for the person who could have solaced him best. My cousin heard all, and marked all, and told me all; for you are a great favorite of his. However, I had something to do with it, afterwards, myself; for the King, knowing that I was in the house, sent for me, and made me tell him whether, when you were last in Berri, you signed your name St. Florent. I was frightened out of my wits, and said I believed you did. The next minute, the King said, looking sharply at the sergeant, who was standing near—

" 'Bring him at once from Briare. Lose no time.'

"Then he turned to me, with a face quite savage, and said—

" 'You may go—'

"I thought he was going to add, 'to the Devil,' but he did not; and I slunk out of the room. The sergeant went out at the same time, and he laughed and said—'Sleep wasted no time, and he was not going to set off for Briare at midnight, not he.' So I did instead of him; for, as I feared I had done some mischief, I thought I might as well do some good."

Jean Charost smiled with a less embarrassed look than he had worn during the ride; but he made no reply, and during the next half-hour he seemed to hear nothing that Martin Grille said, although it must not be affirmed that Martin Grille said nothing. It were hardly fair to look into his thoughts, to enquire whether the injustice he had met with, the wrong which was meditated against him, and the ingratitude for services performed and sufferings endured in the Royal cause, had shaken his love towards his King. Suffice it, they had not shaken his loyalty towards his country,

and that, although he might, perhaps, contemplate flying with his Agnes beyond the reach of an arm that oppressed him, he never dreamed of drawing his sword against his native land, or of doing aught to undermine the throne of a Prince to whom he had sworn allegiance.

At length, however, Martin Grille pulled him by the sleeve, saying—

“I cannot help thinking, my good lord, that you are taking a wrong course. You are going on right towards Bourges, and at a point of the road you may meet with the sergeant and his men. Indeed, I saw, just now, a party of horsemen on the hill there. They have come down into the valley. But that is the high road to Bourges they were upon.”

“My good friend, I *am* going to Bourges,” replied Jean Charost; “but, as I do not intend to go as a prisoner if I can help it, we will turn aside a little here, and go round Les Barres, that hamlet you see there. We

can then follow the bye-roads for eight or ten miles farther, and cross the river at Cosne. I know this country well; for during the last twelvemonths I have had nothing to do but to think, and to explore it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

It gives one a curious sensation to stand on the spot where great deeds have been enacted : to tread the halls where true tragedies have been performed : to fancy one sees the bloody stains upon the floor : to fill the air with the grim faces of the actors : to imagine oneself surrounded with the fierce passions of other days, like midnight ghosts emitted from the grave. I have stood in the small chamber where the most brutal murder that ever stained the name of a great nation was devised and ordered by the counsellors of John of Bedford. I have stood where an act of justice took the form of assassination against Henry of Guise : I have beheld the prison of the guilty and the unhappy Mary, and the lingering death-cham-

ber of the innocent and luckless Arabella Stuart.

But, although these sights were full of deep interest, and even awe, the effect was not so strange as that produced by passing through ancient places of more domestic interest, where Courts and Kings, the brave, the fair; the good, the wise, or their opposite, had lived and loved, enjoyed and suffered, revelled and wept; in times long, long, long gone by. Often, when I have read some glowing description of masque or pageant, or scene of courtly splendour, and have visited the place where it occurred, I have asked myself, with wonder—"Could it have been here—in this mean and poor-looking place?" and have been led, from a comparison of the actual scene with that described in the past, to conclude that in those earlier days men were satisfied with much less, and that the splendor of those times would be no splendor to ourselves.

The great hall of Jacques Cœur, the wealthiest merchant in France, now holding high

office at the Court, and, in fact, the Royal Treasurer—a hall celebrated throughout all Berri—was, indeed, a large and well-shaped apartment, but still very simple in all its decorations. It was, perhaps, more than forty feet in length, and four or five-and-twenty feet in width, and was vaulted above with a semi-circular arch, ceiled with long planks, finely jointed together, of some dark, unpolished wood. The same material lined the whole hall; but on the walls the wood was polished and pannelled; and four pilasters in the Italian fashion ornamented each corner of the wall, and seemed, but only seemed, to support the roof.

Many candles were required to give light to that large, dark room; and it was very insufficiently illuminated. What little light there was, fell principally upon the figure of the young King, as, seated at a small table in the midst, he leaned his head upon his hand in a somewhat melancholy attitude, and bent his eyes down towards the floor.

“Will she come?” he said

“Will she come? And, if she will not, how must I act? This good merchant says, she will; but I doubt it—I doubt it much. Hers is a determined spirit; and when once she has chosen her part, she abides by it obstinately. Well, it is no use asking myself if she will come, or thinking what I must do, should she refuse. Kings were made to command men, I suppose, and women to command Kings.”

And a faint smile came upon his lips at the conceit.

While it still hung there, a door hard by opened—not the great door of the hall, but a smaller one on his right—and a sweet voice said—

“Your Majesty sent for me.”

“Agnes!” exclaimed the King, rising, and taking her hand, “Agnes, why have you left me so long?”

“Because I have been ill, and miserable,” she answered; and the tears rose in her beautiful eyes.

"And I, too, have been ill and miserable," said Charles, leading her to a seat close by his own. "Do you not know," he continued, in an earnest and sad voice, "that, from time to time, a moody, evil spirit seems to take possession of me, making me sicken at all the toil and pomp of State, at all the splendor, and even all the gaiety, of a Court? His visits are becoming more frequent, and more long. No one can drive him from me but you, Agnes."

"Can I drive him from you always?" she asked. "Has he not resisted me lately, very lately; till I lost hope, lost courage, and was compelled to take counsel with my own heart, and listen to all its bitter self-reproach? Charles—Charles! oh, my King and Lord! there is nothing can console—nothing can comfort—under the weight of my own thoughts, but to believe and know that you are worthy of better love than mine—the love of your whole people. Take not that comfort from me. Let me, let me believe that neither passion, nor moodiness,

nor any evil spirit, will lead you to do an act of injustice to any of your subjects."

"Well, well," said Charles, kissing her hand, "it shall be as you will, my Agnes. You shall decide de Brecy's fate yourself. However rebellious a spirit he may be—however insolent his tone—I will forgive him for your sake. It shall be as you will."

"Nay, not so," answered Agnes, gently. "I ask you not to forgive insolence or rebellion. All I beseech you, is, to enquire unprejudiced, and judge without favor. De Brecy is somewhat bold and free of speech. He always was so, even from his boyhood; but he is faithful and true in all things. I saw him peril his life, rather than give up a letter to the Duke of Burgundy. I saw him submit to the torture, rather than betray to the Council the secrets of your uncle the Duke of Orleans. It is his nature to speak fearlessly; but it is his nature to speak truly; and all I ask of you, is, to judge of him as he is, un-

tinged by the yellow counsels of Trimouille, or the black falsehoods of that woman of Vendôme. I hear that some paper he has sent you has moved your anger, and that you have ordered his arrest. Before you judge, investigate, my dear Lord. Remember that he has many enemies—that he has offended Trimouille, who never forgives—and that the love of my bright little name-sake for him is an obstacle in the way of Jeanne of Vendôme, than whom a more poisonous viper does not crawl upon the earth.”

“I *will* investigate,” answered Charles. “I *will* judge unprejudiced; and my better angel shall be by my side to see whether I keep my word with her.”

“Not alone, not alone,” said Agnes, “or they will say, in their malice, that favor for me, not sense of justice, has swayed the King. Have your Chancellor here. He is a noble man and true of heart. Nay, let all who will be present to see you act as I know you will act, justly and nobly—sternly, if you will—for

I would not even have love pleading for love affect you in this matter. Oh, think only, my noble Charles, of how you may have been deceived against this gentleman; how Trimouille's enmity may have read an evil gloss upon his actions; how Jeanne of Vendôme, and her false nephew, may have distorted the truth. Take the whole course of his life to witness in his favor; and then, if you assoil him of all fault—then Agnes perhaps may plead for favor to him."

"She shall not plead in vain," said Charles, embracing her. "Some time to-morrow, probably, the sergeant will be back, and I will hear and judge de Brecy's cause at once; for we are lingering in Bourges too long. There is, moreover," he continued, holding her hand in his, and gazing into her eyes with a smile—"there is another cause for speedy decision. The King's authority, till this is all concluded, suffers some contempt. A daring act has been committed against our state and dignity; and hints have reached us that the traitor is above

our power. 'Tis policy in such a case not to investigate too closely, but to remove all cause of contest as soon as possible."

Agnes sank upon her knees, with a glowing cheek, and bent down her fair forehead on his hand, murmuring—

"Forgive me ! Oh, forgive me !"

Charles threw his arm round her fondly, saying—

"Thank thee, my Agnes ! Thank thee, for letting me have something to forgive."

She was still at his feet when some one knocked at the door, and, raising her gently, Charles said aloud—

"Come in."

"May it please your Majesty," said a page, entering, "Monsieur de Brecy waits below to know your pleasure concerning him."

A slight flush passed over the King's cheek.

"This is quick indeed !" ejaculated Charles.

"Why does not the sergeant whom I sent, present himself ?"

"There is no sergeant there, your Majesty.

Monsieur de Brecy, with a few attendants, came but a moment ago, and is in the vestibule below with Monsieur Jacques Cœur."

"Let him wait," said Charles; "and in the mean time summon Monsieur des Ursins hither.—Wait; I will give you a list of names."

"Now, Agnes," continued the King, when he had despatched the boy, "I will act as you would have me. We must have other ladies here. Go, love, call some—some who will best support you."

About an hour after, in that same hall, Charles was seated at the table in the midst, with his bonnet on his head, and some papers before him. The Queen was seated near, and some fifteen or sixteen ladies and gentlemen, members of the Court, stood in a semi-circle round. The door opened; and, ushered in by one of the attendants, Jean Charost, followed closely by Jacques Cœur, advanced up the hall with a bold, free step. When within two paces of the table, he paused, and bowed his head to the King; but without speaking.

"Monsieur de Brecey," said Charles, "I sent one of the sergeants of our Court to bring you hither."

"So I have heard, Sire," replied de Brecey. "But, learning beforehand that your Majesty required my presence, I set out at once to place myself at your disposal."

"You have done well," said the King, "and we would fain believe that no contempt of our authority, nor disloyalty towards our person, is at the bottom of your heart."

"I have proved my loyalty and my reverence, Sire," replied de Brecey, "by shedding my blood for you in the field against your enemies, at all times, and on all occasions, and by lingering in inactivity for long months at Briare, in obedience to your commands."

"Well," said the King. "It is well. But there be special circumstances, when men's own interests or passions will lead them to forget the general line of duty, and cancel good services by great faults. Charges of this kind are brought against you."

"My Lord, they are false," replied de Brecy. "And I will prove them so, either in your Royal Court, by evidence good and true, or in the lists against my accuser, my body against his, and God to judge between us."

He glanced as he spoke towards a slight young man standing beside la Trimouille; and the King, mistaking his look, said, with a light laugh—

"Our ministers are not challenged to the field for their actions, Monsieur de Brecy. La Trimouille is a flight above you."

"I thought not of Monsieur la Trimouille, Sire," replied de Brecy. "I know not that I have offended him, and, moreover, I hold him to be the best minister your Majesty ever had; because the one who has made your authority the most respected. I spoke generally of any accuser."

"Well, then," said the King. "In the first place, tell me with that truth and freedom of speech for which you have a somewhat rough

reputation; have you, or have you not, good cause to think that a young lady, who has been brought up under your charge from infancy, and lately at our Court, is the daughter of our late uncle, the Duke of Orleans?"

"I have, Sire," answered de Brecy.

"Then how did you presume to claim the guardianship of her, against our power?" demanded the King, sternly. "As our first cousin, legitimate or illegitimate, she is our ward."

"My answer is simple, Sire," replied de Brecy. "I have never done what your Majesty says; and, if I had, when last I stood before you, I should have done it in ignorance; for it is but three days since I received, from one Lomelini, Abbot of Briare, then upon his death-bed, certain information regarding her birth. These packets should have been delivered to me long before; but they were retained through malice. I now lay them before you, to judge of them as may seem meet."

"Look at them, des Ursins," said the King; and the Chancellor took them up.

"I can prove, my Lord, the King," said Juvenel de Royans, stepping forward, "that, when last in Berri, Monsieur de Brecey was quite uncertain whose child the young lady was; for we had a long conversation on the subject, when he gallantly threw himself into the citadel of this place, to aid us in defending it for your Majesty."

"Silence, silence!" exclaimed the King; and, taking up a paper, he held it out towards de Brecey, saying, "Did you sign that paper, sir?"

"No, Sire," replied de Brecey. "I never saw it before."

"Then whose is it?" cried the King.

"Mine," replied the voice of an old man, in somewhat antiquated garments, standing a step or two behind Agnes Sorel. "I signed that paper of right." And, advancing with a feeble step, he placed himself opposite the King.

"And who may you be, reverend sir?" demanded Charles, gazing at him with much surprise.

“The man whose name is there written,” replied the stranger, “William, Count of St. Florent; the only lawful guardian of the girl you wrangle for. You took my property and gave it to another. I heeded not, because I have no such needs now. But when you sought to take away the guardianship of this poor girl from him to whom I entrusted her, and to bestow her hand upon a knave, I came forward to declare and to maintain my rights. They have been dormant long; but they are not extinct. Each year have I seen her since she was an infant; each year have I performed some act of lordship in the fief of St. Florent; and I claim my right in the King’s Court—my right to my estates—my right in my—” He paused for an instant, and seemed to hesitate; but then added, quickly, and in a tremulous voice—“in my child.”

The King looked confounded, and turned towards the Chancellor, who was at that moment speaking eagerly to Agnes Sorel, with the fell

eyes of Jeanne of Vendôme fixed meaningly upon them both.

“Monsieur-des Ursins,” said the King, “you hear what he says.”

“I do, Sire,” answered the Chancellor, coming forward. “You have made your appeal, sir,” he continued, addressing the old man, “and, perhaps, if you can prove your statements, his Majesty may graciously admit your rights without the trouble of carrying your claim before the Courts. You have to show, first, that you are really the Count of St. Florent; secondly, that the young lady in question is legally to be looked upon as the daughter of that nobleman. Her birth at present is not at all established. None of these letters, but one, prove anything, and that proves only a vague belief on the part of a Prince long since dead.”

The old man drew himself sternly up to his full height, which was very great; and said—

“You ask me for bitter proofs, Chancellor.

Methinks you might know me yourself; for I first gave you a sword."

"I can be no witness in my own Court," said the Chancellor; "and the cause, if it be tried, must come before me."

"Stand forward, then, Jacques Cœur," cried the other. "Do you know your old friend?"

"Right well," answered Jacques Cœur, advancing from behind de Brecey. "This, please your Majesty, is William Count of St. Florent. I have seen him at intervals of not more than two or three years ever since he disappeared from the Court and army of France, and have received for him, and paid to him, the very small sum he has drawn from the revenues of St. Florent. If my testimony is not enough, I can bring forward twenty persons to prove his identity."

There was a dead silence for several moments; but then the Chancellor said, addressing the King—

"This may be perhaps admitted, Sire. I have no doubt of the Count's identity. But

there is nothing to show any connection whatever between him and this young lady, whom the Duke of Orleans in this letter seems to have claimed as his daughter."

At those words, a fierce, eager fire seemed lighted up in the old man's eyes; and, taking a step forward, he exclaimed—

"Ay, such claim as a robber has to the gold of him whom he has murdered!" Then, suddenly stopping, he clasped his hands together, let his eyes fall thoughtfully, and murmured, "Forgive me, Heaven! Sire, I have forgot myself," he said, in a milder tone. "My right to the child is easy to prove. I was her mother's husband. She was born in marriage. I myself gave her into the arms of this young man." And he laid his hand upon de Brecy's shoulder. "With him she has ever been till the time you took her from him. Let him speak for himself. Did he not receive her from me?"

"Most assuredly I did," replied de Brecy, "and never even dreamed for a moment, at the

time, that any one had a claim to her but yourself."

"Nor had they, nor have they," returned St. Florent, sternly.

"But it is strange, good sir," said Charles, "that you should trust your child to the guardianship of another; that other a mere youth, and, from what I have heard, well nigh a stranger to you."

"There are wrongs, King of France, which will drive men mad," said St. Florent, fixing his eyes full upon the King's face. "Mine were such wrongs, and I was so driven mad. Yet, in this act, which you call strange, I was more sane than in aught else. This young man's father I knew and loved, before he ruined himself for his King, and died for his country. Of the youth himself, I had heard high and noble report from this good merchant here. I had seen him once, too, in the convent of the Celestins, and what I saw was good. I knew that I could trust her to none better, and I trusted her to him."

“But can you prove that she is your wife’s daughter?” asked la Trimouille; “for these papers in the hands of the Chancellor, seem to shew, and Monsieur de Brecey himself admits there is cause to believe, that she is the child of the late Duke of Orleans, and, consequently, a ward of the King.”

He spoke in a mild, sweet tone; but his words seemed almost to drive St. Florent to madness. His whole face worked, his eyes flashed, and the veins in his temples swelled.

“Man, would you tear my heart out?” he exclaimed, in a fearful tone. “Would you drag forth the dead from the grave to desecrate their memory?” And, snatching up the other packet which de Brecey had laid upon the table, he tore off the cover, exclaiming—“Let me see what this contains. Ha!” he continued, as his eyes fell upon the small case of sandalwood, “Ha! These are her trinkets—poor, lost, unhappy girl!”

Laying his finger upon the cover, he looked sternly at la Trimouille, saying—

"Whose are these arms? Mine. Whose are these initials? Hers—Marie de St. Florent."

As he spoke, he opened the case, and gazed upon the diamonds.

"Oh, Marie, Marie!" he exclaimed. "When I clasped these round thy neck, little did I think—but no more of that. My Lord, the King, what does your Majesty say to my just claim? I gave my daughter's guardianship to this young man. I now give him her hand. I ratify your gift of the lands and lordships of St. Florent. What says your Majesty?"

"In sooth, I know not what to say or think," answered Charles.

"I think I see my way, Sire," said the Chancellor, "although the case is somewhat complicated. If Monsieur de St. Florent can prove that this young lady is the daughter of his wife, he is undoubtedly, by the law of France, her lawful guardian, and all opposition to his claim, grounded on other facts, is vain. So much for that view of the case. But even

supposing he cannot prove the fact, here is a letter from his Highness the Duke of Orleans, whose handwriting I well know, which, though somewhat informal, contains matter which clearly conveys the whole of his authority over the young lady, if he has any, to Monsieur de Brecey. In either case, then, your Majesty cannot err, nor violate any of your own edicts, or those of your predecessors, by restoring the guardianship to him from whom it has been taken under a misapprehension. Any other course, I think, would be dangerous, and form a very evil precedent."

Trimouille bit his lip; and Jeanne de Vendôme slowly nodded her head, with a bitter smile towards Agnes Sorel.

"So be it, then," said the King, with a gracious look towards Jean Charost. "Take her back, de Brecey, if you can find her, which we doubt not; and, if you bestow her hand upon any one else but yourself, he shall have our favor for your sake. If you wed her yourself, we will dance at the wedding, seeing that

you have submitted, with patience and obedience, to a sentence which we sternly pronounced, and sternly executed against you, in order to teach all our Court and subjects, that not even those whom we most highly esteem, and who have served us best, can be permitted to oppose our expressed will, or show disobedience to our commands. Your sentence of exile from our Court is recalled, and we shall expect, not only your attendance, but your service also; for, wedded or unwedded, we can spare no good sword from the cause of France."

He spoke gaily and gracefully; and then, looking round with a smile, he said—

"Is there no wise and pitiful person, who, in charity, can give us some information of where our fair fugitive is?"

"In my Castle of St. Florent," said the old Count, who had now sunk down again into the appearance of age and decrepitude; "and there de Brecy will find her to-morrow. Let him take her—and let him take her inheritance

also; for I go back to my own living tomb to work out the penance of deeds done in madness and despair."

"Methinks, Sire," said Jean Charost, who had marked some facts which created suspicion, "it were well that I should go to-night. St. Florent is very insufficiently guarded, and these are strange times."

"Nay, nay. This is lover's haste," said Charles. "But, as you say, there may be danger of rash enterprizes on the part of rivals, now that her abode is known. We will, therefore, to spare all scandal, entreat some fair lady to undertake the task of bringing her back to the Court this very night, which is not yet far advanced. Who will undertake it? She shall have good escort, commanded by this gallant Knight himself."

"I am ready, Sire," said Jeanne de Vendôme.

"Then I beseech your Majesty let me go also," exclaimed Agnes Sorel, eagerly.

Charles looked from one to the other, and replied, in a somewhat jesting tone— .

“ Both go. A litter shall be prepared at once ; and, as a moderator between you, ladies not always well agreeing, when too closely confined, I will ask our good friend, Messire Jacques Cœur, to accompany you. Quick, ladies, prepare. De Brecey, see for your horses. On your return, you shall sup with us, and we will forget all but what is pleasant in the dream that is past.”

CHAPTER XIX.

A LITTLE after ten o'clock at night, a party of about five-and-twenty persons, escorting one of the large horse-litters of the day, stopped in the court-yard of the old Castle of St. Florent. One or two servants came forth to meet them, and instantly recognised de Brecey's right to admission. Lights were procured, and Jean Charost himself, handing Agnes Sorel from the litter, led her into the great hall, while Jacques Cœur followed with Jeanne of Vendôme.

"My indignation at that woman's duplicity," whispered Agnes Sorel, as they advanced, "has made me very thirsty. Let them bring me some water, my friend."

Jean Charost gave the order she desired, to the servant who went before them with the lights; and the whole party of four paused for

an instant in the hall, Agnes Sorel bending her eyes upon the ground, as if lost in thought. Suddenly, however, she raised her head, saying,

"Come, de Brecy, I will not keep you from your love. I will lead you to her. I know where she is to be found."

"Ha!" said Jeanne de Vendôme, with a very marked emphasis, as Jean Charost and his fair companion left the room.

"Will you not go with them, madam?" asked Jacques Cœur, who had no great love for the lady left behind.

"I think not," replied Jeanne de Vendôme, in a quiet, easy tone. "Lover's meetings should have as few witnesses as possible." And she and Jacques Cœur remained in the hall, the good merchant going to the window, and gazing out upon the night.

A minute or two after, the servant returned with a flagon of water from the Castle well, and a silver drinking-cup. These he set upon the table, and retired. Jeanne de Vendôme

gazed at them for a moment, and then said, aloud,

“I am thirsty, too.”

Quietly approaching the table, she placed herself in such a position as to be between the flagon and Jacques Cœur, poured herself out some water, drank, set down the cup again, and, after remaining a short time in that position, turned to the window, and took her place beside the merchant.

In the meantime, Jean Charost, with a light in his hand, accompanied Agnes Sorel up the stairs and through a long passage at the top.

“You seem to know the Castle even better than I do,” he said, as she guided him on.

“I have been this road in secret once before,” she answered, gaily. “Mine is a happier errand now, de Brecy; but we must thread out the labyrinth. I have hidden your little gem where best it might lie concealed.”

A few moments more, however, brought

them to a door, which Agnes Sorel opened ; and there, with an elderly waiting-maid of Madame de Brecy, stood his own Agnes, gazing with anxious terror towards the door. She was somewhat pale, somewhat thinner than she had been ; and the noise of horses' feet in the court below had made her heart beat fearfully.

The moment she saw de Brecy, however, she sprang forward, and cast herself into his arms. He pressed her closely to his heart ; but all he could say was—

“My Agnes—my own Agnes! All is well, and you are mine.”

Agnes Sorel put a fair hand upon the arm of each.

“May you love ever as you love now !” she ejaculated, “and may God bless you in your love ! Oh, de Brecy, just a year ago you gave me the most painful moment I have ever felt. When I told you I would guard and protect her, there came a look—oh, such a look !—into your face—a look of doubt and fear—more re-

proachful, more monitory, more condemnatory, than anything but my own heart has ever spoken. I give her back to you now, pure, and true, as you left her with me, with the bloom and brightness of her mind as fresh and unsoiled as ever. Love her, and be beloved, and may God bless you ever !”

De Brecy took her hand, and kissed it.

“ For how much have I to thank you !” he answered—“ for all, for everything. I am certain that, but for your influence, this happy meeting would never have been.”

“ It might not,” rejoined Agnes, with a cheek glowing with many emotions. “ But I call Heaven to witness, de Brecy; that the influence which I unrightly possess has never been, and never shall be, exercised but to do justice, to prompt aright, and to lead to honor. Now, let us go. Agnes, you must back with us to the Court as the bride of him you love. Make no long preparations or delay. You will find us

waiting for you in the hall. Come, de Brecey, come. More lover's words another time."

When they reached the hall, Agnes advanced at once to the table, filled the cup, and drank; then, turning gaily to Jacques Coeur, she said—

"We have not been long, my friend. I went on purpose to cut caresses short. Our fair companion will be here anon. How brightly the stars are shining! Methinks it would be very pleasant if one could wing one's way there up aloft, and look into the brilliant eyes of Heaven."

A minute or two after, she turned somewhat pale, and seated herself in a large arm-chair which stood near. She said nothing; but an expression of pain passed across her countenance. Shortly after, de Brecey's Agnes entered, prepared to go; and Agnes Sorel rose, supporting herself by the arm of the chair, and saying—

"Let us be quick. I feel far from well."

She was soon placed in the litter, and they went on quickly towards Bourges; but, once or twice during the short journey, Jacques Cœur put forth his head, urging the drivers of the litter to make more haste. When they entered the court-yard of his house, and the litter stopped before the great door, the good merchant sprang out at once, saying—

“ Help me to carry her in, Jean; she is very ill.”

They lifted her out in their arms, and bore her into the house, pale and writhing. Confusion and dismay spread through the Court; physicians were called and gave some relief. She became somewhat better—well enough to travel to a distant castle; but ere six weeks were over, the kind, the beautiful, the frail, was in her grave; and none knew how she died.

From that moment, a fear of poison seized upon the mind of Charles the Seventh, and affected the happiness of all his after days.

The King did not keep his promise of being present at the marriage of de Brecy and Agnes de St. Florent ; and their own joy was baptised in sorrow.

THE END.

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13

14

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16

17

18

19

20

21

